SUSI FERRARELLO

THE ETHICS OF LOVE

Emotional Dilemmas for a Relational Life

ROUTLEDGE

VISIT…

THE ETHICS OF LOVE

This book explores the ethical and psychological dilemmas connected to the lived experiences of love, uniquely proposing an ethical framework that can be applied in loving relationships.

The book provides an introduction to the study of ethics, moral psychology, and ancient philosophy. Examining key themes of love, such as unconditional love, romantic love, anger, desperation, and fairness, this book offers the reader a way to exercise and strengthen their personal critical thinking on ethical dilemmas, especially in relation to loving feelings. The author believes that ethics is the heart of love in the same way as logic is the brain of reasoning; we do not need ethics to love but we can love in a much healthier way if we train our ethical skills to love. After laying the theoretical framework for the book, chapters are organized into themes relating to ethical problems and begin with an exemplary piece from Greek and Latin literature. Using these writings as a starting point, Susi Ferrarello discusses whether it is possible to have a sound ethical theory of love, especially in cases relating to justice, despair, and rage, and demonstrates how this framework can be applied in new and established relationships. Filled with case studies throughout, spiritual exercises are listed at the end of chapters to help the reader increase their understanding of love and their ethical choices surrounding emotional dilemmas.

This interdisciplinary book is essential reading for undergraduate and graduate students who take classes on ethics, marriage and family therapy, psychology, philosophy, classics, ancient philosophy, and politics, as well as those interested in the ethics of love and emotional decision-making.

Susi Ferrarello is assistant professor at California State University, East Bay. She is also a philosophical counselor and writes for *Psychology Today*. Among her recent books are *Human Emotions and the Origin of Bioethics* (Routledge, 2021) and *The Role of Bioethics in Emotional Problems* (Routledge, 2021).

"In a world filled with superficial portrayals of love and ethics, Susi Ferrarello beautifully engages their intricacies. *The Ethics of Love* pushes the reader to think more deeply about anger, choice, tragedy, unconditionality, and meaning. Ferrarello's use of case illustrations, classic literature, practical application, and reflective exercises make the book accessible and highly enjoyable. I highly recommend it!"

Louis Hoffman, *PhD, Licensed Psychologist and Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association; Editor,* Humanistic Approaches to Multiculturalism and Diversity

"Dr Ferrarello's *The Ethics of Love* is an elegant and meaningful exploration. She uses mythology, philosophy, and relatable case examples interwoven to facilitate an exploration of themes associated with the suffering, pleasure, and power of love. Throughout, the reader becomes acquainted with the universality and nuances of love and the ethical responsibility we all have in our treatment of those who are close to us. Ferrarello's command in depth and breadth of sources and her creativity in bringing them together is a delight. It is a treasure—integrating a rich tapestry of philosophy, myth, and clinical work that is thought-provoking, relatable, and engaging throughout."

Nicolle Zapien, *PhD, LMFT, Professor, California Institute of Integral Studies; Candidate, Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California*

"What can we learn from ancient philosophy and, especially, from Greek mythology? A practical way of life. In this extraordinary book, Susi Ferrarello brings the reader through a journey of myths and persons, human experiences, and philosophical interrogations, in search of the meaning of every form of love. Through the stories of her clients, the author unveils the ethical framework of every affective relationship, recalling not merely the vulnerability of human beings, but also her resilient ability to stand for what matters in life."

Francesca Brencio, *Philosopher, University of Seville, Spain*

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Emotional Dilemmas for a Relational Life

Susi Ferrarello

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INTRODUCTION

Is love always good? Is it true that love wins over everything? Common sense says that no matter how disastrous the outcome of a certain action, if the intention behind it is a loving one, then that action could be considered good—or at least forgivable.

I think we can do better than this.

This book discusses the difficult intersection of love and ethics.

Love is the most important component of our emotional life on a personal, social, and interpersonal level and yet not enough education is invested in learning how to love each other in a decent, healthy way. The possessive love of a mother toward her son, the abusive love of a violent partner, the self-absorbed love of a mentor toward pupils—these are all ways in which we can hurt each other, although love is the main motor behind the action. One might object that if love is possessive, abusive, or self-absorbed, then it is not love. The problem is that however poorly we express it, we might still feel invested in these feelings; we might be blind about our being possessive, abusive, or self-absorbed—but we love. Hence, the problem is not just about love but about the ethics that help us to love each other in a decent way. Ethics stands to loving in the same way as logic stands to reasoning. We do not need ethics to love but we can love in a much healthier way if we train our ethical skills to love. A healthy ethical reasoning behind our way of loving could help our society to avoid mistakes—often made in good faith—that would prevent people from withdrawing from society or from actively harming it.

Hence, in this book I discuss the importance of ethics for love in the same way as I would discuss the importance of logic for reasoning. Ethics is the heart of love in the same way as logic is the brain of reasoning. We do not need to know about logic in order to reason correctly; yet we need to study logic if we want to be able

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to reason complex problems. We do not need to become logicians, but it is the training of the ethical engine that drives our capacity to love.

Although my previous book on love and intimacy (Ferrarello 2018) discusses the various forms of love as they emerge from the Greek vocabulary, such as eros, agape, and philia, here I would like to propose a relational form of love that allows us to see it in its dynamic relational form. As in the beautiful poem of Chandra Livia Candiani, the Accuracy of Love (2014) is in the hug we can give to each other. In this interpersonal connection we are called to disarm ourselves, become closer to each other, and connect with each other's vulnerability in the connection between two bodies. In this book, from Chapters 1 to 5 I examine the practical side of an ethics of love: I propose a story from an ancient epic or piece of literature and compare it with a story of a client in my philosophical counseling practice in order to examine the ethical dilemmas within their love life. At the end of Chapter 5, I present practical exercises that might help train individuals in such ethical skills. These exercises mirror the ethical takeaway that I wrote at the very beginning of each chapter. In these lines, I tried to summarize the ethical essence behind the specific love conundrum that is presented in each chapter. Also at the end of each chapter, the references are organized in such a way that, wherever possible, I offer literature to further expand one's personal knowledge on the topic. Different from the others, Chapter 6 is instead fully dedicated to philosophy in the attempt of finding a theory of ethics that fits in the relational character of love and the interpersonal challenges it elicits. Except for this last, sixth chapter in which ethics is discussed as a precise normative philosophical theory, apt to guide individuals toward understanding norms for good actions, the general meaning of ethics in the other chapters aligns with practical reasoning around the sense of responsibility, choices, and conscious decisions that we can make.

Although I tried to be loyal to my perspective in discussing the intersection between ethics and love, I would say that it was difficult to let the female voice out. My guiding criterion was to select famous epics and literature that belong to my Western tradition as an easily relatable example for others who might find themselves in similar situations. However, this literature is often populated by heroic men and women who are silent and whose space of action is very limited. This is the reason why I was particularly careful in interpreting Penelope's waiting or Ismene and Antigone's sororal bond in a way that could resonate with women near my age living in Western society. I do apologize if the book does not entertain Eastern narratives, but I had to make a choice, as I did with the themes I decided to discuss. Clearly, the book could have been much longer, and I could have included many more cases. The criterion for my decision was the frequency with which these ethical and love dilemmas happen to be discussed during sessions with clients. I hope I served readers who might feel torn whether to give into their rage or to love someone, whether to unconditionally love a difficult partner or to be loyal to themselves, whether to believe in love or to be rational and detached—and so on.

After having discussed these five cases, I realize that the intersection between ethics and love leads me straight to the core of vulnerability. In the end, this book is about vulnerability (my vulnerability perhaps); the vulnerability we encounter when we face ethical dilemmas that have to do with love; or when we face the question: what am I doing in this relationship?

This is never an easy question and yet we rarely receive sufficient education at school or at home to address it. A proper answer to a question of this magnitude requires emotional maturity, a quality that we do not seem to consider core in our educational system today, but it may very likely become essential in the future considering the speed at which mental and emotional disorders are growing.

What can I do with my son who is lost in dangerous addictions? What can I do with my violent partner? What should I do if I do not love my husband? What should I do to find real love in life? These are extremely important questions in ethics and in our educational systems which would help us critically think through such problems.

An act of pure love does not come as naturally as the act of sleeping or eating. Loving might be easy because it could be the point of convergence of different interests and inclinations. But loving in a pure way—without gaining anything in return and with the open mind of seeing that person for what that is—is a rarity. It takes plenty of fortunate circumstances, some of them casual like a flower blossoming on a plant, others perhaps more ethical and willfully guided.

"Philosophy was born as love for wisdom, but in fact what they love is reasoning"

As mentioned above, I believe that logic is to reasoning in the same way as ethics is to loving—we need to educate our minds to that if we want to foster a sustainable society. Nozick wrote: "philosophy was born as love for wisdom, but in fact what they love is reasoning" (2008, 225). I do not discuss philosophy's love for reasoning, but I question philosophy's resistance to reason on love. Love is a powerful force that can turn us blind in our ethical judgment; its power should encourage us to study it even more rigorously and question even more vehemently any instrumental and anti-political use of love. In fact, even though Kant's words on love are not always encouraging, his moral imperative urges us to be ethically caring toward our neighbors. Without proper emotional maturity, even an ethically meant application of care would potentially become evil if applied as a way of forcing one's own will over that of another, or discarding one's way of living. Hence, in the light of the mysterious and multifaceted enigma of love we should not just tap on its resources without patiently educating ourselves to its understanding. We should not treat love the same way as we have been water and all the natural resources that our Earth offers us; we should carefully pay respect to it and understand when we waste or abuse these resources.

Sablé argues that in the experience of love, one acquires knowledge of the other's moral motivation that cannot be doubted. It is here that altruism and self-sacrifice actually operate.

Unlike political exercises of altruism, love by its nature possesses an internal transparency that does not permit it to be mistaken for another disposition. "Love has a character so particular that one can neither hide it where it is nor pretend it exists where it is not" (Maxim no. 80). Other virtues may be feigned if the agent has ulterior motives for dominating the other. In love, however, the external acts and the internal dispositions of the agent become one. "Love is to the soul of the one who loves what the soul is to the body of the one it animates" (Maxim no. 79).

The Structure of the Book

The book is organized in six chapters. The structure of Chapters 1 to 5 is the same. At the beginning of each, I provide an ethical takeaway that summarizes the sense of the chapter in a short maxim and the ethical direction it points to. In the chapters, I use a famous episode from an epic to provide a paradigm of the dilemma I discuss in that chapter. I also compare this paradigm with the stories of my clients and my way to see through that complexity. At the end of each chapter, I offer philosophical exercises that can be done to train ethical reasoning in that specific area of interconnection between love and ethics. Using philosophy as a philosophy of life, I provide exercises that can increase our capacity to cope with ethical difficulties in love dilemmas. The sixth chapter instead uses philosophy as a rigorous reasoning through ethics to see if an ethics of love is actually achievable and what shortcomings it might have. Although I consider this chapter as being interconnected with the others, it can be read as a standalone.

Hence the chapter-by-chapter content organization is the following.

In the first chapter, I analyze the connections between my client's story and Penelope's and Odysseus' story. My goal is to understand if love requires ethical strength, or if it is simply a matter of lucky chemistry between individuals. I question what waiting meant for Penelope and Cristina, and ask whether love or friendship kept Odysseus and Penelope together. Throughout the chapter, I address questions such as: if we were to live a fear-free life that liberated us from the illusion of controlling our destiny, would we still act responsibly? Penelope and Odysseus decide to choose what was right for them independently of their being a couple—if anything, they could be considered the best counterpoint to codependency. Although they are newlyweds, Odysseus leaves so he can get to know the world ("*Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence/For my old father, nor the due affection/ Which joyous should have made Penelope,/Could overcome within me the desire/ I had to be experienced of the world,/ And of the vice and virtue of mankind;*" Dante, Canto XXVI, 94–99) and to be loyal to his own destiny and identity. His love for his wife does not hinder his ardor for his life's path, and vice versa.

Penelope chooses not to marry someone else. Day by day, minute by minute, she stubbornly gains the freedom to live her life according to her principles; she remains the queen of her realm.

I also ask whether love has anything to do with ethics and personal choices. Love asks for an ongoing act of courage; it requires our finest ethical compass to avoid stagnation and betrayal (of ourselves and others). We are characters in an incomprehensible play; we are constantly called to action and the fulfillment of our portion of destiny (*moira*). Staying true to our romantic choice independently of immediate gain or the fear of loss is a difficult but rewarding task. It is hard to maintain the balance between what we mean to do in our intentions and what we are actually doing. The ethical goodness of love comes from the commitment to action (*phronesis*) for personal and mutual truthfulness concerning one's own destiny. Becoming aware of the vulnerability of the human condition and the conventionality of social rules pushes us to commit to true happiness, not just to biological survival.

If we were radically free from our biological needs, why would we choose to love? We would choose to love because we need this companionship. Our body can survive without a companion, but such survival would be unfulfilling for many of us. We would also learn less from the journey. The periods of separation between Penelope and Odysseus are an integral part of their love story; they are charged with an intimate quality because of the curious, open-minded companionship that willingly keeps the two of them together. As with Scanlon's ethical answer to moral goodness (1998), we owe each other good deeds and a good quality of love because it is the most reasonable thing to do. It is possible to spend a life without loving anyone. But loving and being loved according to the best of our intentions and the best of our possibilities is the most reasonable thing we can do to get through life in a meaningful way.

The second chapter focuses on the role that rage plays in our lives, especially when we have to make choices concerning our love life. Being lovingly connected with ourselves and others is an choice we need to make—but a choice that is sometimes made difficult by circumstances.

In this chapter, I use Achilles' story to show how the negative form of destructive rage (*ate*) will never help us to make this connection. It increases our distance from our integrity and self-love. Courageous rage (*thumos*), on the other hand, pushes us to the limit of our soul and asks us for a quiet obedience toward the deepest sources of our self. In the *Iliad*, obedience is exemplified by Athena's voice. Being able to obey what is right is not easy, but it can set a chain of good choices in motion that puts our life in order. To make my thesis clearer, I use cases from my practice to demonstrate the different qualities of rage. I propose the Epicurean theory on rage, to help us understand what lies at the core of our rage and what we can do to make it less blind and empty. If we trace the meaningful beliefs that sustain our rage, we can transform blind rage into courageous rage. This helps us

to make good choices about what we want and how we want to embody the life we have been given.

The third chapter focuses on the question concerned whether love matters for personal good and social justice, or whether we should make important choices independently of our emotions. I use the tension between *amor pius* and *insana cupido* as an interpretive key to unlock an answer to these questions. *Amor pius* (pure love) and *dira cupido* (insane desire) are the two faces of love, which each reveal human strengths and weaknesses. In this chapter, I use the story from the *Aeneid* and the story of my client as examples of how choices in our love lives can affect ourselves and our society. A social paradox emerged through these stories: the injustices committed in the name of love are often praised as possessing high social value. This happens because we have not been sufficiently trained in ethics for love. We are therefore uneducated in how to handle the compulsions of love, although we are educated in reason in order to handle the contradictions of our minds. In the last part of the chapter, I propose friendship and care as exemplary variants of love. Friendship and care can open a space to ethically discuss human bonds and vulnerability in love.

The fourth chapter focuses on the importance of the sense of tragedy. I aim to show how the lack of tragedy can lead to loneliness and poor ethical judgment. After describing the origin of the word "tragedy" and the polarity that the word describes, I use the example of a client to show how the lack of the tragic sense can lead to loneliness and blindness. I reinforce this argument through my reading of Antigone's and Creon's conflict. I propose *phronesis*, practical reason, and self-known passions (*autognoteos orga*) as the ethical solutions for overcoming this defective sight (*omma deinon)* and improving our capacity to make loving ethical choices.

In Chapter 5, I discuss unconditional love and its challenges. We often think that we cannot love unconditionally because we would lose our boundaries or commit ourselves to self-sacrifice. This belief is fed by a religious and philosophical misreading of love. In this reading, we are the recipients of an overflowing loving energy. We are no longer responsible for owning the flow of love and learning how to use it. However, I believe that giving up on unconditional love means that we lose the opportunity to connect with a vital source of energy. Loving unconditionally means separating our own projections from the person we love. It means being able to see that person for who they really are. In loving unconditionally, we should be able to redirect toward ourselves that transformational energy that we would otherwise impose on the one we love.

To illustrate these issues, I use the example of Ismene. Her struggles with Antigone show us how difficult it is for her to accept her sister. Such acceptance (or lack thereof) affects our lacks and needs. I outline the evolution of unconditional love, and how this form of love has been seen in various religious and philosophical sources as more fit for God than humans. However, Aristotle and humanistic psychology provide us with suggestions for cultivating unconditional

love in our lives. They point us toward the limits that need to be overcome for this challenging love to be pursuable in our lives.

In the concluding chapter, I tackle the problem of an ethics of love that would be capable of finding a balance between intellect and heart—universal rational principles and self-serving reasons. I focus on the imperative to "be loving," considering its relational quality and the love-values that fulfill its meaning. I intentionally avoid investigating the will as the primal source of this ethics. If the intellect has priority, then our ethics of love runs the risk of being a desiccated matter of rational calculation. If the will has priority, then love itself becomes blind, unable to explain its motivations. In this sense, Frankena's agentic aretaic ethics of love proposes love as a relational predicate that acquires its meaning in its relational practice. A similar way to reconcile this problem was sketched by Pascal: in his use of the term "heart," he successfully reconciles aspects of the intellect and the will without collapsing into either (Warner 1989, 161; Levi 1964, 326–8). He explains the cognitive and emotional dimensions of the heart in this famous fragment:[1]

> The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We know this in a thousand things. I say that it is natural for the heart to love the universal being naturally and itself naturally, according to its practice. And it hardens itself against one or the other as it chooses.
>
> *(L423/S680)*

Pascal invites us to clarify the love-values that animate the deep roots of our being; this is an ethical process. Our rational motivation to act has reasons that only the heart knows; its lock is often buried in that deep soil of our being. Connecting to it is an act of care—of love—that we owe to ourselves and others.

For this reason, as we saw from our brief exploration of utilitarian, deontological, and virtue ethics of love, I favor an ethics of love that does not see love as the end goal of one's actions. I want to avoid turning the recipients of love into disposable tools. I discuss the deontological proposal for an ethics of love that emerges in Kant and Kierkegaard as a formal guiding principle that can point our choices in the right direction. However, it cannot help us in resolving personal love conflicts or help us to build a loving moral character. I then consider Frankena's virtue ethics of love, borrowing the notion of an agentic aretaic judgment to "be loving". I read this judgment through the lenses of a relational theory of language and a phenomenological ethics. From Husserl's phenomenological interpretation of love and its values emerged a rich relational love ethics grounded in love-values. Love-values are deeply rooted in our egoic psyche; although conflicts might arise among them, they inspire an obligation in us to care for ourselves and the other. Indeed, it is in ourselves that we find the first other. Being loving is an agentic virtue that connects us to the deepest roots of our being and demands the imperative to care for others. This connection to love-values is the self-evident proof of care. Giving space to the values that allow us to be loving activates our

self; it connects us to authentic meaning concerning our being. It is in these love-values and the exertion of this virtue that we are called to the obligation to care for others. This obligation does not call for external rewards—the virtue of being loving is itself rewarding—but it is an essential constituent of the virtuous conduct of being loving. We cannot be loving if we do not care for ourselves and others. Even if conflicts arise, therefore, they are a proof of care; it is up to our self-responsible ethical behavior to clarify the source of that conflict and find a caring way to resolve it.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this introduction with the beautiful words of a sonetto from Dante:

Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona
de la mia donna disiosamente,
move cose di lei meco sovente,
che lo 'ntelletto sovr'esse disvia.
5
Lo suo parlar sì dolcemente sona,

che l'anima ch'ascolta e che lo sente
dice: "Oh me lassa! ch'io non son possente
di dir quel ch'odo de la donna mia!"
E certo e' mi conven lasciare in pria,
10
s'io vo' trattar di quel ch'odo di lei,

ciò che lo mio intelletto non comprende;
e di quel che s'intende
gran parte, perché dirlo non savrei.

Especially in this last terzina Dante summarizes in sublime poetry the difficulty I wanted to tackle in this book. Love that elicits reasoning in my mind (*amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*) speaks a language that my intellect does not understand. Whenever we speak about love, what I can grasp is difficult to express. That is why actions, hence the territory of ethics, are the words of love because they are what we would not be able to know (perché dirlo non saprei). The enigma of love speaks a language in our hearts that we can feel and maybe reason through thanks to the help of ethics. The discipline that regulates the kindness and harmony of our action is a good guidance where cognitive and logical approaches fail us to provide words for this mystery.

Note

1 See Pascal: "It is the heart that provides us with the knowledge of first principles that cannot be demonstrated. It operates by means of its own kind of perception, characterized by the verb *sentir* (feeling) and its derivations. We know the truth not only through our reason but also through our heart. It is through the latter that we know first principles and reason. The heart's knowledge of first principles such space, time, motion, and number is as solid as any derived through reason; it is on such knowledge that reason has to depend and base all its arguments. The heart feels [*sent*] that there are three spatial dimensions and that there is an infinite series of numbers. . . . Principles are felt [*se sentent*], propositions proved, and both by certainty though with different means . . ." [L110/S142].

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1

LOVE OR LUCK?

Introduction

Have you ever felt stuck in a relationship? Have you ever felt a strong chemistry with someone that faded as quickly as it started? Is love a matter of luck and good chemistry, or do we bear responsibility for participating in a rewarding love life?

We do not fall in love because it is the right thing to do, but because it *feels* right.

Romantic feelings and emotions arise without our consent. Of course, we can choose whether we want to act upon them. This small window of freedom to decide what to do with our romantic feelings is the space we have to build an ethics for our love life. In ethics, as much as in romantic life, a certain degree of decisional skill is required for love—and the good—to unfold. As Kant remarked, if we were obliged to behave properly, we would have no actual choices to make; without choice no moral action could exist at all (2015). Autonomy—with its etymology in the Greek compound of *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law), meaning self-regulation—is the cornerstone of ethical behavior. Without the ability to choose which rule to follow in a given situation, good behavior would merely be a passive imitation of social conduct. The same holds true for love. If we had no choice in love, and it consisted only of a chemical predetermination for attraction toward someone, it would be hard to gauge the sincerity of our feelings.

One of the consequences of autonomy—in ethics and in love—seems surprisingly limiting. Self-regulation could still be understood in bio- and socio-deterministic terms. That is, we may think that if we behave in a certain way then we can control how our life will develop. If I study, for instance, I will not receive bad grades. If I am faithful to my spouse, she will not be unhappy in our relationship. This may lead to our making choices that are charged with expectations and dictated by superstitions. If we think that personal autonomous decisions have the

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power to determine the outcome of an interaction, then we might also think that we can exert a high level of control over life's unpredictability. We might therefore decide to behave in an ethically proper manner in our romantic life because we believe that if we do so, then others will do the same to us and we will be safe. I will not cheat, so she will not cheat. But this is not ethical; it is simply playing safe in order to confine our absolute freedom within a code of shared rules. By becoming aware of the conventional nature of those rules, and the human vulnerability that these rules try to protect, we can develop a more sustainable ethical mindset in love. By accepting our own vulnerability, the autonomy of ethics in romantic life will become conducive to handling the complexity of our romantic feelings in a responsible way. Without this acceptance, romantic life and personal ethical choices are reduced to instruments for our survival.

I believe that love may be prompted by lucky chemistry, but it is tested over and over by life. It requires us to accept our own vulnerability. It demands a refined ethics to pass the tests life gives us and to understand the meanings that they offer. It seems that love—good and healthy love—involves an ethical component. This ethical component requires us to use our freedom to move toward the tranquility that Epicureans identified as happiness (more on this in the next chapter). In this chapter I will draw from the life of one of my clients, which I will compare to the story of Odysseus and Penelope. I will analyze Odysseus and Penelope's story as a paradigm of a challenging love story in order to understand what makes their tale so universal and eternal. My goal is to understand whether their romance can be considered a story of ethical love, or whether it is just sheer luck.

I. Cristina

My client was in her mid-40s when she contacted me. Cristina was a good-looking woman: very athletic, with big, charming eyes. She was miserable in her marriage, experiencing bottled-up rage against her husband. They had been married for 18 years, had two children, and had been going to couples therapy for a year. She did not like interacting with their therapist; she felt stigmatized by his comments.

To me, she seemed like Penelope: vulnerable but strong, waiting for a solution that she herself could not bring about. Good chemistry had brought her together with her husband; now that the chemistry had faded, they had to choose what to do about being a couple. They were on a journey in two different lands, far from each other.

When I met Cristina, I felt that it was very difficult to reach her. She was cordial and sweet, but her real self was safely hidden behind a thick wall. Her best wall of protection was represented by her children. They were her "Penelope's web"; their lives functioned to keep intruders at a distance. The children were her best excuse for shying away from direct questions or challenging propositions.

Until we met, Cristina had organized her whole life around the needs of her loved ones: her husband, her children, and (when necessary) her mother and

sisters. When I met her, she was exhausted and out of love. She felt betrayed by her sisters who, for different reasons, considered her care for them to be too intrusive. Most importantly, she felt betrayed by her husband. She felt that he took from her as much as he could and gave nothing back. Like Odysseus, he had left her alone with their children after a year of marriage. He did not engage in his children's lives as much as she wanted him to, although he provided for them financially. Cristina was also working in a company, however, and made sufficient money to sustain herself and her family if she wanted.

I helped Cristina to make her leadership of her own life more robust, so that she could clarify the difference between caring for herself and imposing care on others. I helped her to reorganize her needs in such a way that she would not lose them in the needs of others. We reinforced her boundaries so that she could take better care of herself and others. It was especially important to create boundaries regarding Cristina's husband, who was growing more and more to be a stranger to her. She needed to understand to what extent it made sense to endure certain behaviors. She slowly began to care more for herself and accordingly overcame her fears of abandonment and loneliness. She became a good friend to herself; she was more present to herself and so felt less abandoned. She did not feel lost whenever her husband threatened to divorce her. She cared for others without forgetting about herself. She became indifferent to her husband's blackmailing attitudes. She felt stronger. Like Penelope, she fully became the queen of her realm.

Like Penelope, though, Cristina was still waiting for something. She did not want to make the choice to divorce her husband. Although she was in an unhappy marriage and could not see any solutions, she did not want to formalize their separation. Although she contacted a lawyer to find out what a separation would involve, she strongly felt that she had to wait. She could not be the driving force behind that change. She was stalling—her instincts told her to wait. In talking to her, I perceived that there was much going unsaid. This was partly due to her unawareness and partly due to a strong desire to protect her *status quo*. She wanted to change her life but she also wanted to remain stuck in that life. She was waiting for a return that she herself could not yet see.

I.1. My Way of Telling Penelope and Odysseus' Story

After twenty years of adventures, Odysseus is ready to come back home. For ten years he fought against tremendous warriors in the Trojan war, resisted the charm of enchanting sirens, and defeated frightening giants. Now, he finally stands before the gates of his kingdom. Through the help of his divine protector Athena, Odysseus steps foot onto the island of Ithaca (Book XIII).[1]

Of course, his vicissitudes do not end here. He stands before the gates of his city, but as a beggar. He is no longer the lord of his kingdom. He certainly does not appear like a lord—he is poor, thin, and tired, with a long beard and torn clothes. Nevertheless, he is at home now. He must find a way to enter the palace without

being killed by his enemies, who have become the inhabitants of his kingdom in his absence.

An opportunity emerges. Odysseus finds a way to meet Eumaeus, his old counselor. At first, the old man cannot tell Odysseus from the other beggars. Meanwhile, Athena inspires Telemachus, Odysseus' son, to speed up his return from a mission at sea (Book XIV).

Once reunited, the three men devise a plan for Odysseus to come back to the palace without raising suspicion. They think that the best way to do this is for Odysseus to take part in a fight for the amusement of Penelope's suitors (Book XV). The winner of the fight would have the privilege of being the only beggar permitted at the palace. Obviously, the powerful Odysseus wins, displaying a much stronger and more muscular body than he originally seemed to possess (Book XVI).

But once Odysseus arrives at the palace, a nightmare appears before his eyes. He finds his worst enemies everywhere, behaving intolerably: not only toward his home but toward his loved ones. The scene seems unbearable. There are suitors everywhere, wasting his resources, mocking his son, and harassing his wife. For 20 years he has not seen Penelope—nor has he smelled her hair, nor looked into her eyes (Book XVII).

She does not look a day older; her beauty is no less striking than the day of their farewell. Penelope does not recognize Odysseus, although Argo (his dog) and Eurycles (his nurse) do.[2] But it is not yet time for him to reveal his identity to her (Book XVIII).[3]

Polymethis (cunning) Odysseus is now inside his kingdom. He needs a plan to free his land from the enemy. He persuades Telemachus to hide the suitors' weapons: after he attacks, they will not have time to find their weapons and fight back. Odysseus then gains Penelope's trust, in order to have her on his side once the fight begins. He tells her that her king is about to return, and reveals details to her that only he could have known.

At first, Penelope does not believe him—maybe she chooses not to believe him. She appears conservative and cautious. She has too much to lose if she believes him so soon. For 20 years, she has kept her suitors at bay with a cunning stratagem. She promised that she would marry one of them after the shroud for her father-in-law's eventual burial was complete. She wove the shroud every day, and each night she unraveled nearly all the day's work. In this way, she kept the suitors at a distance for years—until they found out about the unraveling from a servant.

Penelope devises a way to test Odysseus, in his guise of the stranger, and give him a chance to prove himself right (Book XIX). A bow contest is organized: the winner will marry Penelope. But they will use Odysseus' bow for the contest—if the stranger really is Odysseus, this bow will give him the advantage he needs over the competitors and the marriage will no longer be necessary. The suitors are pacified and Penelope is kept safe (Book XXI).

The day of the contest arrives. Odysseus fights the suitors and wins, with Telemachus' support. He can finally reveal his identity to Penelope. But she still does not believe that this old man really is her husband—the man for whom she has been waiting for 20 years. Odysseus must find a more personal way to convince her. Even after Athena intervenes to make Odysseus more attractive (Book XXIII, vv.166–72), Penelope remains unconvinced. Odysseus must provide her with more compelling proofs. The poem closes with the beautiful and metaphorical secret the two have shared for all these years. Odysseus tells Penelope that their bed was made by him out of olive wood, and cannot be moved because it was carved from an honest-to-Zeus olive tree. (Book XXIII, vv.177–9). After this proof, Penelope lets down her defenses and renews her trust in her husband.

II. Penelope and Odysseus: The Characters

What can Penelope and Odysseus tell us about their choice to remain together? Is it truly a choice that keeps them together, or does their reunion happen due to luck and a lack of viable alternatives? Is their love merely a means to survival? I will address these questions through descriptions of their characters.

II.1. Penelope

Periphron Penelopeia and *polymethis* Odysseus, wise Penelope and cunning Odysseus, are the story's protagonists.[4] Πηυελόπεια—Penelope—means "spindle loosener." She receives this name because of the trick she pulls on the suitors.

Who is Penelope? She is a queen, and Odysseus becomes a king by marrying her. When Odysseus leaves for the Trojan war, they have been married for only a year. But she decides to wait for him with their little son, Telemachus, and chooses not to get married to any of her suitors. Perhaps she has faith in her husband's return even after 20 years of waiting. Or perhaps she does not find anyone worthy of losing her status of queen. If Penelope had given up on Odysseus, then the man she married would have become the next king of Ithaca. However, she does not seem openly dismissive of her suitors. She uses her difficult position to her advantage—Odysseus is not the only *polymethis* (cunning) hero of the poem—so that the wooers compete with each other rather than uniting against her. In Book XV, we read that "she does not often appear when those men are present; she keeps herself away from them and goes on with her weaving in her own rooms." This seems to make "her more desirable (...) for you are the pearl of women for beauty and intelligence too!" (Book XVIII).

Penelope has been interpreted as the quintessential symbol of womanhood and faithfulness because of her seemingly passive role in the poem. However, modern interpretations have challenged this traditional view, stressing Penelope's active role in the plot of the *Odyssey*.[5] Silvana La Spina (1998), Annie Leclerc (2001), and Margaret Atwood (2005) have all rewritten Penelope's story in such a way that

her multifaceted personality emerges. These texts show how her emotions are not limited to waiting patiently for her long-missed husband.

Leclerc's book *Toi Pénélope* depicts Penelope as someone who is actively committed to defending women amid the revolution sparked by the return of her beloved husband. When the suitors are slaughtered, Penelope tries to conceal her servant Melantho and the maidens whose lives are at risk in the chaos of Odysseus' attack. Although Penelope cannot prevent the violence, she at least attempts to protect her fellow sisters. In *The Penelopiad*, conversely, Atwood light-heartedly imagines Penelope's youth. Both Penelope and Odysseus are depicted with very human traits: he is an open liar, and she is jealous of her cousin Helene's beauty. La Spina's novel *Penelope* is even more realistic, even crude. Penelope recounts her life to Euryclea while Odysseus is downstairs, drunk, relating his sexual adventures to his friends. Penelope's aim is to denounce the violence that men use on women: by recalling her life she reveals the brutal details of her relationship with her father, her mother's suicide, and the selfishness of her husband and son. This version of Penelope is a clear denunciation of the patriarchy which is sadly present if we look at Homer's poems.

Homer calls Klytaimnestra "bitch-faced." Penelope, on the other hand, is considered to represent the honorable woman because she is "passive and quiet" and also cautious, circumspect, discreet, and wise. Even Agamemnon, encountering Odysseus in Hades, acknowledges Penelope's merits: "She who is so tender-hearted, and circumspect" (Book XI). He advises Odysseus on his marriage: "So don't be too open with your own wife, don't tell her every thought in your mind, reveal a part, keep the rest to yourself" (Book XI, 462). Odysseus does not follow Agamemnon's advice literally (fortunately, I would add). As he returns to his house and holds his wife in his arms, he tells her all his adventures—with some omissions (Book XXIV)—and shares with her the ups and downs of the 20 years he spent without her.

II.2. Cristina and Penelope

Although separated by millennia, Cristina and Penelope experienced similar restraints due to their strongly patriarchal upbringings and unfair social rules. Both felt that they have few options for maintaining their power over their families and households. To keep their power intact they had to resort to *astutia*—a term Boccaccio uses when praising Penelope's intelligence. *Astutia* is the practical intelligence of those who lack freedom.[6] Like Penelope, Cristina was very quiet and protective of her nannies and her sisters; her husband had sometimes been violent and inclined to rage against them. When I met her, she no longer appeared to trust her husband. He had told her he was in love with her and wanted to make up for his bad behavior, but his mood was still very unstable. The moments in which he was calm and understanding were followed by moments of rage and aggression. Cristina's husband was behaving like Penelope's suitors. Their happiness together

was by now a distant memory: metaphorically speaking the husband Cristina fell in love with sailed off soon after their babies were born (he became more aloof and detached), probably called to a path of growth and individuation that she could not experience.[7]

It is in solitude that Cristina and Penelope could remain queens of their realms. I asked Cristina: "If you were completely free to choose, what would you do for yourself now?" "To be alone," she answered. She chose to be a Penelope; she waited for her husband to come back. But in that waiting, she chose to be alone. She was aware that her husband would never come back, that he would never defeat his mid-life crisis and the roots of his rage. She could not force her husband's process of individuation and emotional growth just as she could not interrupt her own. She had limited independence: she had been raised in a Mediterranean patriarchal system. Although it was luck (or fate) that brought this couple together, their remaining together was a quiet and constant ethical choice. Even if Penelope and Odysseus, and Cristina and her husband, apparently remained together out of chance, they actually made important choices in their love lives. But are these women really waiting for their husbands' return?

II.2.1. What Were They Waiting For?

I am not sure that Penelope is actually waiting for Odysseus. The literature on Penelope's early recognition of Odysseus is wide and produces convincing evidence in favor of the hypothesis.[8] If Penelope really is aware of her husband's arrival but pretends not to recognize him, then her waiting is not entirely for him. It seems to me that Penelope is living through a challenge; in that challenge, she is measuring her strength. Penelope, like Cristina, is out of options: she is living in a situation that does not fit a clear social category. Any choice that either woman could make would lead them closer to disgrace: one of Penelope's suitors would become king, Cristina's violent husband would gain more time alone with the children. During their challenges, in those undefined situations, they remain queens. Both retain control of their lives and the lives of the people who need their protection: Telemachus and the servants for Penelope, and the children and nannies for Cristina.

If Penelope is truly waiting for Odysseus, she would drop everything the moment she sees him. Penelope and Cristina *are waiting*, but they are not waiting for their men to return. They are waiting for their fates to unfold—to finally set them free to be themselves without concealing their skills. It has never been about their husbands. They are ready to face rejection—an important moment for Cristina occurred when she could face one of her husband's favorite threats, "I want a divorce," without blinking. Odysseus also rejects Penelope in his long detour away from home.

Penelope and Cristina are waiting for their growth to come to full fruition; they are on the heroine's journey, taking steps on the path toward individuation.

They know that growth has to occur in themselves and their husbands, and they know that their husbands' return is not secured. Their return would be a happy ending but it is not what sustains the strength of their waiting. Empowerment is what sustains their waiting—Cristina and Penelope are waiting for the power to be completely themselves, inside and outside their homes. In *De mulieribus claris*, Boccaccio openly praises Penelope's intelligence (*astutia* and *astu femineo*)[9] and moral strength[10] for handling this state of suspension. Their husbands' return is like Godot's arrival. When *Waiting for Godot* was staged at the San Quentin State Prison in California in 1957, the director Herbert Blau was worried about how the complex piece would be received by the 1400 inmates. The performance was a success. As one of the inmates stated: "The thing that everyone in San Quentin understood about Beckett, while the rest of the world had trouble catching up, was what it meant to be in the face of it."[11] Penelope, my client, and these inmates are prisoners of a life path that requires them to grow into themselves. They know what it means to wait for the wait itself. Waiting for the bigger picture to unfold, waiting for nothing to happen because nothing *is* the bigger picture for the time being, waiting for something big or small to change, waiting for this waiting to become a meaning.

II.3. Odysseus

The etymology of Odysseus' name is uncertain. If "Odysseus" is connected to *oduonmai*, it could have three etymological meanings. The name could indicate a man who *shows* an unusual degree of irascibility or hatred, a man who *causes* an unusual degree of hatred or anger in others, or a man who *suffers* from an unusual degree of hatred or anger inflicted by others (Stanford 1952). These various meanings reflect Odysseus' identity as a warrior.

Who is Odysseus? He is first of all a hero—but an atypical hero (Stanford 1983). He is a man who has an enormous amount of courage to face change; maybe his heroic nature stems from this courage. Changes dwell in his family blood: his maternal grandfather was the thief Autolycus, son of Hermes, whose shape was mutable. On a Jungian reading, Odysseus is thus the archetype of the trickster. His actions are mostly driven by his grandfather's and father's blood: he cheats on his wife, deceives a giant, tricks his companion. But at least he *acts*. With these actions, he enables the flow of social life to move forward. He is an instrument of *moira* (destiny); his changes are rewarded by the love of his wife and his people.

Odysseus is strong. His friend Eurylochos tells him: "You are a hard man, Odysseus. Your force is greater, your limbs never wear out. You must be made all of iron" (Book XII, 279–80). He is a fighter—an angry one. "Now," he tells the suitors, "upon you all the terms of destruction are fastened" (Book XXII, 37). He is crafty, from which comes the adjective that usually accompanies his name: *polymethis* (cunning). When he is trapped in Polyphemos' cave, he is clever enough to blind the giant and then call out, "Nobody is my name. My father and

mother call me Nobody, as do all the others who are my companions" (Book IX, 366–7). This trickery saves him from the giant, who comes out of the cave looking for Nobody to kill.

Homer also describes Odysseus as a passionate lover. During his journey back home, he entertains three troubled relationships that delay his *nostos* (coming back). These relationships are with Circe, Nausicaa, and Calypso.

Circe is a goddess who enchants Odysseus' crew with her alluring voice. Homer describes her as "Singing in a sweet voice as she went up and down a great design on a loom, immortal such as goddesses have, delicate and lovely and glorious in their work" (Book X, 221). Odysseus' men cannot resist her: their desire for Circe allows the goddess to exploit their weaknesses, trick them, and magically turn them into swine. As Odysseus writes: "Swear me a great oath that there is no other evil hurt you devise against me" (Book X, 344). Odysseus is also charmed by her and remains with her for a year. Perhaps Homer intends to demonstrate that a woman's sexual appeal is a threat to male self-control.

Odysseus delays his return for seven years more because he is charmed next by Calypso and kept captive on her island. The myth tells us that Athena helps him to regain his freedom and return to his wife. Calypso is a beautiful nymph who offers Odysseus the chance to become her immortal husband. But he prefers to grow old with his mortal wife than remain immortal beside this charming creature. Nevertheless, Odysseus is fascinated by Calypso. Between the two alluring characters of Circe and Calypso there is a third woman, Nausicaa. But Nausicaa is just a quick flash of beauty in the poem; she does not seem to leave a strong trace in Odysseus' life.

Circe, Calypso, and Nausicaa never persuade Odysseus to abandon his wife and son. His determination to return to Ithaca is challenged, but never defeated.

Odysseus is also kind and sensitive. See how Homer describes him:

> So the famous singer sang his tale, but Odysseus melted, and from under his eyes the tears ran down, drenching his cheeks. As a woman weeps, lying over the body of her dear husband, who fell fighting for her city and people as he tried to beat off the pitiless day from city and children; she sees him dying and gasping for breath, and winding her body about him she cries high and shrill, while the men behind her, hitting her with their spear butts on the back and the shoulders, force her up and lead her away into slavery, to have hard work and sorrow, and her cheeks are wracked with pitiful weeping. Such were the pitiful tears Odysseus shed from under his brows, but they went unnoticed by all the others […].
>
> *(Book VIII, 521–32)*

Sexist simile aside, Odysseus' tears at the sound of the Phaiakian bard singing about the Trojan war betray his sensitive nature.

There is no consensus regarding Odysseus' moral character. The Sophists and Socrates considered Odysseus' versatility to be a proof of the corruption of democratic institutions.[12] Odysseus is often associated with the figure of the demagogue, transformed into the embodiment of personal politics. Tragedians also condemn Odysseus' actions as immoral and selfish, whereas Antisthenes depicts Odysseus in Cynic terms as the reformer of the human race who does not care for appearances or mistreatment. His behavior is secretive because his final goal is the common good, not personal ambition. Similarly, middle Platonism understands Odysseus as symbolic of a human being fighting to save his soul. Opinions have changed through time about this character who is undoubtedly the hero of this Homeric poem.[13]

Unfortunately, I do not have enough information to draw a parallel between Odysseus and Cristina's husband. Odysseus is the archetype of a resourceful human being who tries to embody his own destiny despite his flaws. From what I gathered, Cristina's husband was going through a midlife crisis; he was trying to understand how his life should have been and what meaning it offered. In doing so, he experienced frustration and fear.

III. How Can We Distinguish Love from Friendship?

Before we consider the ethical quality of Odysseus' and Penelope's love, let us consider whether the story is about romantic love or plain friendship. What is the difference between the two? Are Penelope and Odysseus lovers or friends?

The Ancient Greeks use the words *eros* and *philia* to indicate the difference between love and friendship. The Romans stress the continuity between the two kinds of love, however, by using the words *amor* (love) and *amicitia* (friendship). In Latin, a friend (*amicus*) is someone whom you love (*amo*) but your lover (*amor*) is also your friend (*amicus*). These etymological connections imply that to fall in love with someone, you need to be friends with them. *Amor* might derive, in fact, from Greek *omnymi*, to swear an alliance between two people. Alliance and love are two bonding forms of connection that are clearly continuous.

In his cosmology, Empedocles uses the term "*philia*"—kinship—to indicate the cosmic power that holds together the basic elements of the universe (fire, water, air, and earth) before repulsion (*Neikos*) pulls them apart again (more on this in Chapter 5).[14] Aristotle is one of the first philosophers to investigate the boundaries that separate *philia* from *eros*, friendship from love. Books VIII to IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are dedicated to friendship; Aristotle writes that friendship as a virtue (*arete*) is not grounded on feelings, but on habits and free choice.

Aristotle considers friendship to be the most necessary relationship for a happy life. No one would deliberately choose to live without it. While *eros* is an affection (πάθος)—that is, a modification of a present condition—friendship is a *habit* that we repeatedly choose to practice. Habits (*exeis*) play an important role in Aristotle's philosophy of human behavior: it is through habituation that we strive

for excellence. Goodness is not just something that happens to us, but a choice that we repeatedly practice. Deciding to read every day, taking a walk, or spending less time on the phone—these are all small habits that we can choose to practice every day to achieve a better quality of life. Likewise, friendship is a habit we choose to practice to increase our well-being.

For Aristotle, love is foreign to habits because it is dominated by desire and excitement and aroused by the sight of beauty. Friendship, conversely, is characterized by kinship, reciprocity, and commonality of interests and ideals. By choosing to remain friends and to help each other succeed in life, Penelope and Odysseus are making an ethical choice. According to Aristotle, friendship can be based in utility, mutual pleasure, or goodness, whereas lovers are kept together by a sensual connection. On his account, only friendship based on goodness is destined to last. Love does not seem to involve any choice of goodness, so there is no way to predict how long it will last (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII). Love is solely driven by sensuousness.

After Aristotle, the Epicureans[15] and Stoics[16] both describe friendship as the most crucial experience for human life. Being a friend or having a friend is the most noble experience we can have. It allows us to grow as human beings. Friendship is a natural and necessary desire that can help the individual to achieve *autarkeia* (inner self-sufficiency). To achieve the lucid tranquility that Epicureans call *ataraxia*, we need friends. Epicurus does not see any contradiction between being self-sufficient and being a friend to someone: in friendship, we find the self-reliance that every human being needs to achieve to lessen the solitude of the human condition.

Unlike friendship, love (*eros*) "never helped anyone" (Diogenes Laertius quoting Epicurus, 10.118). Satisfying the natural desire of love requires a careful balancing act and a clear-thinking mind. It is very easy to get lost in erotic drives, losing that state of tranquility that allows us to feel happy. For Stoics, every sensuous pleasure that threatens tranquility should be avoided. However, Epicurus still values erotic love if it is pursued in a balanced way: losing oneself in the raw feelings of passion and intercourse is to be avoided. Odysseus and Penelope do not lose themselves in this way. They seem to be tender lovers who share a solid friendship and decide to avoid other romantic adventures. We can see that their friendship involves conscious choices, made both when they are apart and when they reunite.

In his treatise *Laelius* or *De Amicitia* (On Friendship), Cicero criticizes the Stoics and Epicureans for focusing their description of love and friendship on the notion of self-sufficiency. In fact, Cicero writes, the mutual dependence typical of amical and loving relationships do not spoil human beings. Instead, it makes them richer. The interconnection that friendship creates is the precondition for a meaningful and virtuous life. As Cicero's Laelius says to Scevola, "All that I can do is to urge you to put friendship before all things human; for nothing is so conformable to nature and nothing so adaptable to our fortunes whether they be favorable or adverse" (5, 17, 127).

If we follow the Roman line of continuity between love (*amor*) and friendship (*amicitia*), and the emphasis that Cicero puts on the importance of inter-dependence instead of self-reliance, then we can see how Odysseus and Penelope are both good friends, dependent on each other's support, and passionate lovers who are attracted to one another.

Much has been written in contemporary philosophy on this latter point. Scruton writes that romantic relationships involve the dissolution of any distinction between the two partners (1986, 230). Nozick (1989) defends the same position, identifying this dissolution as a basic trait that draws the demarcation line between friendship and love.

The dissolution of differences and confusion of boundaries is one of the main ways that the Greeks conceive *eros*. For Greeks, love and its variations (passion, romance, tenderness) are often seen as liquid. *Eros* has the same effect as heavy rain: its liquidity has an overwhelming power that is difficult to escape. According to the Greeks, a man's natural condition is dryness, whereas a woman's natural condition is liquidity. Dryness is also the natural condition of reason, whereas liquidity is the natural condition of love. According to this sexist perspective, love is a female force that prevents us from using our minds and dissolves the dryness of our being.

Cicero remarks that both friendship and love are characterized by "checks of trust," without which we would "plunge headlong into ruin." We need friends because we need counselors to tell us if we have lost our way. From this point of view, the greatest difference between friendship and love is not sex or desire, but constancy in ongoing support. Your husband, boyfriend, wife, or girlfriend can be your best friend and your romantic partner because they are there whenever you need advice or support. As Seneca writes, "The wise human being ought to love his wife deliberately, not passionately. He controls the impulse to pleasure and is not headlong to intercourse." Deliberate love, more than passionate lust, is what keeps the marital bond together. Are Penelope and Odysseus kept together by deliberate love?

III.1. Are Penelope and Odysseus in Love with Each Other?

The bond between Penelope and Odysseus is reinforced by practical needs. Penelope needs to remain queen and Odysseus needs to be the king of Ithaca, not the lover of a capricious demi-goddess. Returning to a mortal life is more appealing than pleasing a nymph for eternity.

The historical context that separates our sensitivity from Greek society makes it hard to understand the motivations behind these characters' actions. As Homer might be a collective author, Odysseus and Penelope's story may not be narrated with any specific didactic intent. Their marriage is depicted as one of the most successful in Homer's poems, but we do not know what these collective authors mean to tell us. Moreover, love is a personal feeling. It is difficult to understand if this mysterious author means to deliver a story about *eros* (romantic and passionate

love) or *philia* (loyal friendship). Perhaps he wants to express the complexity of love in all of its layers.

However, these verses stand out to me as strong evidence of Penelope's and Odysseus' deliberate love: "and went to bed themselves throughout the shadowy hall. When the two had had their full enjoyment of lovely love, they took delight in stories, telling them to one another" (Book XXIII, 299–301).

Penelope and Odysseus bid each other farewell when they are newlyweds. Twenty years of separation test their loving bond. The turning point, however, as I interpret the story, is what they choose to do when they finally reunite. They take the time to tell each other their stories and get to know each other all over again. They leave behind their egos and are genuinely interested in knowing what the other went through during their separation.

Penelope and Odysseus decide to be together again. This decision does not happen out of fear, interest, or biosocial luck, but stems from their mutual pleasure in each other's companionship.

Codino (1965, 145–6) considers Penelope and Odysseus to express the deepest form of love because of the choices they make. So does Dante in Book XXVI of *Inferno* (79–142).[17] Dante describes Odysseus as the first to choose to be a human being—that is, to know the world's vices and virtues and the limits of scientific knowledge—and to come back home and be one with his spouse.[18] From this point of view, even the intervention of Athena can be read as a deep form of love. Athena calls Odysseus out of a situation that is difficult for him. As with what happens to Achilles (see Chapter 2), the intervention of a deity is a call for the hero to listen to his authenticity.

Although some critics consider the role of divinity in Homer's poems to be a way of infantilizing the characters, Nietzsche (1872) and Rohde (1925) remind the reader of the psychological relevance of gods in the Homeric world. Gods' interventions are to be taken seriously: they reflect the irrational elements of the collective unconscious. Gods represent what the hero does not expect, although they unconsciously know that this is the road to be taken. Gods usually give heroes the direction they need to resolve a moment of impasse. Gods represent the irrational component of life that is difficult to accept; they bring forth what is truer for that character in a given moment.

Penelope does not recognize Odysseus when she calls Euryclea to bathe the guest (19.407). Although Euryclea does not need proof before recognizing him, Penelope does. Telemachus even accuses her of having a heart of stone (Book XXIII, vv.96–103; Book II, vv.356–9). Maybe she does not want to give away her power so easily and be subjected to a stranger king. Or, as Malerba imagines, maybe she is offended by Odysseus' silence and is taking her revenge. But in the end when she recovers trust in him, she decides to give herself to him. They make love and enjoy sharing their stories.

Although it is difficult to draw a line that separates friendship from love—it is probably pointless to do so—Odysseus' and Penelope's love seems to be a healthy

one, displaying the balance described by Cicero and the Epicureans. It is a form of love that may be prompted by the luck of good chemistry, but that is tested by life's challenges. Love—good, healthy love—needs to have this ethical component to guide us toward Epicurean tranquility.

Penelope and Odysseus lose their erotic bond and exclusivity for a long time. But their mutual support remains strong: they share a common good and remain loyal to their desire to rejoin each other. That is the choice they renew over time—the ethical component of their love.

III.2. Ethical Happiness in Love

In *The Therapy of Desire* (1994), Martha Nussbaum claims that ethics as a technology of life (*biou techne*) is aimed at human flourishing (*eudaimonia*). This condition can be achieved through a commitment to action, according to Aristotle. Thinking about the best way of achieving good and actually doing something to achieve it are two different things. The combination of reasoning and practice (*phronesis*) is key to a happy life lived according to ethical principles. Cristina was committed to finding her way to *phronesis*.

Are Odysseus and Penelope also committed to an ethical life through *phronesis*? Odysseus, this ambiguous hero, apparently personifies this form of ethical life. His intelligence (*metis*), put to the service of *phronesis*, leads him back to his mortal love, Penelope. Although there are diverging opinions about Odysseus' moral worth—Pindar despises him (*Isthmian* 4.34–35), considering him a typical example of moral decadence,[19] whereas MacIntyre (1981, 127) simply acknowledges his precarious identity—he exemplifies a human being with virtues and flaws.

According to the Greeks, we are assigned a portion of destiny (μοῖρα). However, the way in which it unfolds is unpredictable and continuously changing. Societal rules are a way to protect our vulnerability amid this unfolding destiny. Being active and making conscious choices while our destiny is in motion is a challenging commitment. Shaping our life while being shaped by it is what ethical life demands of us. As McDowell remarks (1978, 20), doing well is the unconditional *a priori* for being ethical. What is effective, wise, and good is not originally good but *becomes* so through action.

The goodness of love is an active process of discovery. No book can tell us what is good or bad in a relationship. We write this book ourselves in a faithful and heroic dialogue with our destiny, accompanied by the person we choose to have at our side. An act of courage is needed to set aside the fears that this process evokes. It often happens that the more courage we need to take an action, the more likely it is that the choice will positively impact our romantic life—whether we are confessing our flaws or taking a journey toward individuation. The wisdom of our good practical choice is driven by the principle of reality that requires, according to the Stoics, a complete alignment with one's own intention.

According to Detienne and Vernant's and interpretation (1978), Odysseus' *dolos* (trickery) and *metis* (craft) allows him to go through life's messiness and shape his destiny. In doing so, his love for Penelope grows to be more conscious and thus a more virtuous feeling (19), free from fear, self-interest, and the need for control. They are a happy and unique couple. Happiness is always fragile, and entails an act of strong self-responsibility—as Williams observes (1985, 19)— to let the values of what we achieved arise from our experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed the connections between my client's story and Penelope and Odysseus' story. My goal was to understand if love requires ethical strength, or if it is simply a matter of lucky chemistry between individuals. I questioned what waiting meant for Penelope and Cristina, and asked whether love or friendship kept Odysseus and Penelope together. Throughout the chapter, I addressed questions such as: if we were to live a fear-free life that liberated us from the illusion of controlling our destiny, would we still act responsibly? Penelope and Odysseus decide to choose what was right for them independently of their being a couple—if anything, they could be considered the best counterpoint to codependency. Although they are newlyweds, Odysseus leaves so he can get to know the world[20] and to be loyal to his own destiny and identity. His love for his wife does not hinder his ardor for his life's path, and vice versa. Penelope chooses not to marry someone else. Day by day, minute by minute, she stubbornly gains the freedom to live her life according to her principles; she remains the queen of her realm.

I also asked whether love has anything to do with ethics and personal choices. Love asks for an ongoing act of courage; it requires our finest ethical compass to avoid stagnation and betrayal (of ourselves and others). We are characters in an incomprehensible play; we are constantly called to action and the fulfillment of our portion of destiny (*moira*). Staying true to our romantic choice independently of immediate gain or the fear of loss is a difficult but rewarding task. It is hard to maintain the balance between what we mean to do in our intentions and what we are actually doing. The ethical goodness of love comes from the commitment to action (*phronesis*) for personal and mutual truthfulness concerning one's own destiny. Becoming aware of the vulnerability of the human condition and the conventionality of social rules pushes us to commit to true happiness, not just to biological survival.

If we were radically free from our biological needs, why would we choose to love? We would choose to love because we need this companionship. Our body can survive without a companion, but such survival would be unfulfilling for many of us. We would also learn less from the journey. The periods of separation between Penelope and Odysseus are an integral part of their love story; they are

charged with an intimate quality because of the curious, open-minded companionship that willingly keeps the two of them together. As with Scanlon's ethical answer to moral goodness (1998), we owe each other good deeds and a good quality of love because it is the most reasonable thing to do. It is possible to spend a life without loving anyone. But loving and being loved according to the best of our intentions and the best of our possibilities is the most reasonable thing we can do to get through life in a meaningful way.

Ethical Takeaway

The goodness of love is an active process of discovery and commitment. Luck might play a part in it, but it is up to us how to use our freedom and decide what direction that luck will take.

Exercises

1. In the *Enneads* VI, 9, 10, 27ssg, Plotinus suggests an ethical exercise that can be practiced to impr ove ourselves and our intimate lives in moments of forced waiting:[21]

   > Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labor to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiseling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendor of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine.

2. Another exercise for developing responsibility and phronesis in our love lives is to practice *prosoke*, which is a constant mindfulness toward ourselves and what we do. *Prosoke* comprises a focus on the present moment that frees us from expectations of the future and the memory of the past. This attention makes a person independent and self-reliant: they become capable of distinguishing what is in their hands to change and what instead relies on a higher power. They can come to understand the damaging patterns of thoughts that regulate our life, and what we should favor instead in our way of being.
3. A third exercise to help you focus and grow your awareness about love is to list 50 things, actions, desires, or wishes you expect to meet in your love life and 50 things, actions, desires, or wishes you would be willing to give for love and out of love.

Notes

1 Virgil, *Aeneid*, retrieved from: http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/aeneid.html.
2 There is a wide body of literature supporting the idea that Penelope did in fact recognize Odysseus much earlier in the poem. See for example: Durham (1943); Vlahos (2011); Yamagata (2011).
3 Some interesting fictional exercises imagine how Penelope and Odysseus actually felt at the point in the story. In a beautiful Italian novel by Luigi Malerba (1997), *Itaca per sempre,* the author imagines Penelope feeling hurt by Odysseus' behavior because he decided not to reveal himself to her. Malerba portrays Penelope reacting to this by pretending to not recognize Odysseus and testing his heart in different ways. An interesting story within the story.
4 Here is a list of epithets for Penelope and Odysseus. Odysseus is called resourceful, man of many resources, of many turns, man of twists and turns (πολύτροπος *polú-tropos*), much-enduring (πολύτλᾶς *polú-tlās*), great-hearted (μεγαλήτωρ *megal-ḗtōr*), sacker of cities (πτολι-πόρθιος *ptoli-pórthios*), wise, loved of Zeus, great glory of the Achaeans, master mariner, mastermind of war, hotheaded, man of action, the great teller of tales, man of exploits, man of pain, that kingly man, the hero, raider of cities, the great tactician, and cunning (πολύμητις *polúmētis*). Penelope is cautious, circumspect, discreet, and wise.
5 See for example, Mactoux (1975), Arthur-Katz (1991), Felson-Rubin (1994), Papadopolou-Belmehdi (1994), Clayton (2004), and Heitman (2005). In particular, Mactoux writes: "the poetic role essential to Penelope is not to embody the royal function, the conjugal fidelity or even the female passivity but to be the expression of memory ("*le rôle poétique essential de Pénélope n'est pas d'incarner la fonction royale, la fidélité conjugale ou même la passivité féminine mais d'être une expression de la mémoire*", translation mine from: Mactoux 1975, 171).
6 As Primo Levi beautifully writes in his *Periodic Table*, "We must be more astute. This speech, about the necessity of being astute, was not new between us; Alberto had often made it to me, and before him others in the free world, and still many others repeated it to me later, an infinite number of times down to today, with a modest result; indeed, with the paradoxical result of developing in me a dangerous tendency of symbiosis with a truly astute person, who obtained (or felt he obtained) temporal or spiritual advantages from his companionship with me. Alberto was an ideal symbiont, because he refrained from being astute at my expense. I did not know, but he did (he always knew everything about everyone, and yet he didn't know German, or Polish, and had very little French), that in the plant there was a clandestine industry of cigarette lighters: unknown craftsmen, at spare moments, made them for important persons and civilian workers. Now flints are needed for lighters, and they had to be of a certain size: we had to thin down the rods I had. But how could we thin them down, and how much? 'Don't make difficulties,' he told me. 'Leave it to me. You just worry about stealing the rest of them.'" (1984, 147).
7 I am using the term "individuation" in the Jungian way. Individuation is the process by which a person becomes a psychological individual and recognizes their innermost uniqueness.
8 See, for example, Durham (1943); Vlahos (2011); Yamagata (2011).
9 For a discussion of female deceptiveness and its early Christian underpinnings, see Bloch (1991, 21, 43–4). Boccaccio considers Penelope's astuteness one of the "subtler effects of a masculine culture's attempts to discredit that intelligence" (Blamires, 2005, 213).

10 For Penelope's role as a Renaissance model of female virtue, see Jones and Stallybrass (2000, 110–11); Benson (2004, 149). References to Boccaccio's role in Penelope's development as a Renaissance exemplum can be found in several sources, including Scorza (1984, 434); Ziegler (1992, 31).
11 Rick Cluchey, quoted by Helmore (2016).
12 Of course, this depends on what Socrates we are referring to. In *Phaedo*, Plato undermines the effectiveness of Odysseus' inventiveness. He is caught between approving this quality for its usefulness and rejecting it on moral grounds. In the myth of Er and his descent to the Underworld, Odysseus' soul chooses a human life of withdrawal from politics. Plato introduces a new Odysseus without ambitions who denies military and political life and is ready to embrace philosophy. In the *Symposium*, Odysseus represents the supremacy of the soul over the body because of his self-control. For Homer, Odysseus' persistence leads to his success, but in Plato there is no utilitarian goal: Odysseus' self-control aims only at moral perfection.
13 Retrieved from: https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2012/2012.07.09/.
14 "A twofold tale I shall tell: at one time it grew to be one only from many, and at another again it divided to be many from one. There is a double birth of what is mortal, and a double passing away; for the uniting of all things brings one generation into being and destroys it, and the other is reared and scattered as they are again being divided. And these things never cease their continuous exchange of position, at one time all coming together into one through Love, at another again being borne away from each other by Strife's repulsion" (Empedocles, fr. 17.1–8 cited in Diels & Kranz, 1952).
15 Epictetus, "On Friendship," in *The Discourses*, accessed at www.sacred-texts.com/cla/dep/dep054.htm
16 Marcus Aurelius (1945, 81).
17 See Canto XXVI, 98–102 (retrieved from: http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/EtAlia/inf26.html)

né dolcezza di figlio, né la pieta
del vecchio padre, né 'l debito amore
lo qual dovea Penelopé far lieta,

vincer potero dentro a me l'ardore
ch'i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto,
e de li vizi umani e del valore;

ma misi me per l'alto mare aperto
sol con un legno e con quella compagna
picciola da la qual non fui diserto

Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence
Of my old father, nor return of love,
That should have crown'd Penelope with joy,
Could overcome in me the zeal I had
To explore the world, and search the ways of life,
Man's evil and his virtue. Forth I sail'd
Into the deep illimitable main,
With but one bark, and the small faithful band
That yet cleav'd to me

18 See Canto XXVI, 117–119 (retrieved from: http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/EtAlia/inf26.html)

> *Considerate la vostra semenza:*
> *fatti non foste a viver come bruti,*
> *ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.*
>
> Call to mind from whence ye sprang:
> Ye were not form'd to live the life of brutes,
> But virtue to pursue and knowledge high.

19 Horkheimer and Adorno provide an even more straightforward attack on Odysseus. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) they consider Odysseus the beginning of the end that depicts the empty triumphs of Odysseus, who is an uprooted, cool, selfish man.

20 "Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence/For my old father, nor the due affection/ Which joyous should have made Penelope,/Could overcome within me the desire/ I had to be experienced of the world,/ And of the vice and virtue of mankind" (Dante, Canto XXVI, 94–99).

21 From here on the ethical exercises do not replace eventual need for psychotherapy and/or medications.

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2

RAGE OR INTEGRITY?

The Wrath of Our Ethical Choice

Introduction

Rage occupies a strange place in our society. We do not like making space for its open expression, but we applaud its good effects when they happen. Although we take a punitive attitude toward rage, we also praise it in movies, epic literature, and history books. Take for instance the furious expression of rage in defense of personal pride as it manifests in Ajax, Hector, or Achilles, in historical leaders such as Napoleon or Churchill, or in movie characters like the Godfather or Incredible Hulk.

When rage starts building up, we tend to suppress it because it is not good for us to feel it. Our societal set of rules requires us to tame our urge to let the rage out. When we let our rage go against people we act without respect and love for them. The same might be true when we are in rage against ourselves. Hence, we might wonder if there is ever a good time to feel and express our rage. Does rage make us behave despicably, or does it give us the courage to be who we are and fight for our integrity? Is rage an unethical feeling, or is it a way to access intentions that would otherwise remain buried in our conscience? Is there an ethical connection between rage and love?

I will tackle these questions in this chapter. In the first section, I will discuss an episode from the *Iliad*. Classically, male heroes[1] were often depicted as enraged characters who stood up for what was right for them. In Homer, we find at least two forms of rage: *thumos* and *ate*; courageous rage and blind rage. Reflecting on these two aspects of rage can help us make space for a healthy rage in our society.

In the second section, I will draw on cases from my private practice. I will show how to apply the Epicurean theory of anger to choose which feelings of rage are worthy to be acted upon. I believe that a healthy form of rage allows us to make

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better choices in love—better for ourselves and others. Although blind rage (*ate*) is not ethical or conducive to good choices in love, courageous rage (*thumos*) may be a good form of rage: it follows from an ethical choice that connects us to a deeper source of love.

I. The Good and the Rageful in the Homeric Poems

We do not know what ethical intention moved Homer to write his poems; we do not even know if he really existed. It is hard to say whether he had a pedagogic intent when describing the rage of his hero, Achilles.

In *Moral Value and Political Behavior in Ancient Greece* (1976, 13), Adkins questions the plausibility of the Homeric poems. It is very likely that the events narrated in these books never took place, and it is possible that Homer (or the bards who sang in his name) were not interested in educating anyone by narrating these stories. The *Iliad* is a poem about rage (*menis*), and the *Odyssey* concerns the consequences of this rage and the troubled journey back from its eruption. However, Adkins observes Homer's use of adjectives like *agathos* (good) and *esthelos* (noble) to commend his heroes' deeds (1976, 13). These adjectives do not praise the heroes' good intentions but laud the fact that they did not fail.

Failure is *aischron* (shame). The poem commends the *agathoi* (good people)—those who have a good social status. The *kakos* (evil) hardly exists in the Homeric poems, as Adkins remarks. Even the detestable Agamemnon is just less *agathos* than Achilles—he is still an example of good character (Adkins 1976, 13). Moral values seem to be factual achievements, rather than compasses that orient action. These moral values are often achieved through rage: the hero's wrath is a legitimate way to become an honorable person.

Values stem from factual interconnections between characters and their families. Every character is bearer of a *tyme* (a value-honor) and is good in that he "defends his *tyme*" (Adkins 1976, 16). The actions undertaken by the Homeric characters are good insofar as they are true to that character. In the Homeric world, every action is meant to defend the personal gift with which everyone is born: the honor of being that person. People who help the characters to defend their *tyme* are *philoi*, friends that deserve affection—otherwise they are enemies. According to MacIntyre (1976), the *agathoi* (good people) have *arête* (virtue) because they can take action. In MacIntyre's reading of Homeric society, the virtuous person is the one who is able to function and can embrace his destiny within his layer of the society he belongs to (1976, 4–13). Belonging to a class means being *aristos*: i.e., the best at defending one's own destiny. As MacIntyre remarks in his history of ethics, *arête* (virtue) is all about social functioning (1976). This notion of virtue as societal functioning will become even more evident in Plato's *Republic*.

The kind of action under discussion is already heroic. As Kerényi (1974) and Otto (1954) note, no one is superior to the *Moira* (Goddess of destiny). The right thing to do is to defend one's own destiny (*moron*) as much as possible and let it

unfold on the stage of life. From the Homeric perspective we are good, lucky people if our destiny can be entirely fulfilled. According to this basic set of values, any attempt to prevent the natural course of events is unjust. Dishonorable humans do not have the courage to stand up for their own narrative of life and defend their identity. "The *agathos* must defend himself and his own without the help of heaven" (Kerényi 1974, 21). In Homer, the *thumos* is the positive form of rage—the animosity driving the hero to fight for his destiny.

The *agathoi* are generally allowed to belong to a class because they gain respect from their community through their endeavors. They prove themselves able to safeguard themselves and their people. The moment a good person (an *agathos*) thinks that he is in control of his destiny, however, he becomes blind.

Hubris (arrogance) leads to *ate* (blindness). Enraged blindness is the negative form of rage, and the Homeric hero is punished for it. As Finley (1983) remarks, "hero" is a class term. It refers to someone who is good at defending his own without becoming blind. We are rendered blind whenever we think that humans might be better than gods, better than our destiny (*moira*). Whenever we think that we are in full control of our destiny, then our end is close at hand. Nothing really belongs to us—we are just *loci* (places) made available to inhabit the portion (*moiron*) of the story of life that has been assigned to us. If we are lucky, our *daimon* (fiend, angel) will help us to defend that portion of our life and narrate our story, but we do not have full control over this. Thinking otherwise is hubris, hence a sign of arrogance. Homeric characters are one with their feelings; defending those feelings means defending the place in which their story will be performed.

I.1. Positive and Negative Rage

Positive rage (*thumos*) transforms us into heroes: it fosters our bond with ourselves and helps us to defend our own destiny. This rage is what makes us good people (*agathoi*)—or even the best in our social class (*aristoi*). Conversely, ego-driven rage clouds our judgment and makes us behave like fools. It deludes us into believing we are in control of our destiny. This is the rage that leads to *hubris* (arrogance) and *ate* (destruction). Ego-driven rage is the *hamartia* (fatal flaw) that triggers tragic events. Such events will change our lives forever. In what follows, I will use Achilles' story in the *Iliad* to elaborate on these forms of rage.

I.2. Achilles and His Rage

It would be unfair to Achilles to read his story as simply being about aggressive and foolish rage. It is true that Homer's invocation to the Muse, with which the *Iliad* opens, asks for inspiration to write a poem about *menin* (rage). However, there is also a strong sense of love in that rage—a love that Achilles is trying to defend.

The plot of the first book of the *Iliad* is simple but difficult to narrate.

There are two heroes and one woman. Everyone around them wants to know who is going to "win" the woman. But the story is not really about winning and losing. On my reading, the story's core is an ethical dilemma of love. The story is about the love of a man for his woman, his own destiny, and his people.

The book begins with a quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon. As is often the way, their names already tell the story they are going to live. Achilles (Αχιλλευς) probably means "pain" in Greek, perhaps stemming from *achos*, whereas Agamemnon means "someone who thinks too fast" (from *Ἀγαμέδμων, ἄγαν, "too" and μέδομαι, "think on").

The story is set in the final year of the war between the Acheans and the Trojans. The Acheans are slaughtering thousands of Trojans.

A priest (Chryse) at the court of King Agamemnon wears Apollo's scarf—he has devoted his entire life to Apollo. Chryse goes to the Acheans to beg Agamemnon—in the name of Apollo!—to cease his attack against the Trojans and to send his daughter Chryseis back to him. Agamemnon speaks these words in answer:

> Who cares about Apollo's scarf and stuff? […] I'll not release the girl to you, no, not before she's grown old with me in Argos, far from home, working the loom, sharing my bed. Go away.
>
> *(vv.30–35)*

Old Chryses, humiliated by Agamemnon, has only his prayers to turn to. Leaving the Achaean court, he prays to Apollo: "If I've ever pleased you with a holy shrine or burned bones for you—bulls and goats well wrapped in fat—grant me my prayer. Force the Danaans to pay full price for my tears with your arrows" (v.40).

Apollo is furious and chooses to vindicate his priest: he casts a plague on the Acheans, to gruesome effect. Many Achean warriors die, and their army grows weaker and weaker.

The protagonist appears now on the scene: swift-footed Achilles, the hero, summons a meeting to discover why this curse has fallen upon the Acheans. The prophet Calchas volunteers an answer—but first he makes Achilles swear an oath to protect him against Agamemnon, who will dislike the answer he is about to give. Achilles swears the oath. By the time Calchas finishes speaking, Achilles is furious. "Incensed, spirit filled with huge black rage (…) Eyes blazing fire" (v.80). His answer is pure *menin* (rage).

Agamemnon will give back the girl, Chryseis, but only in exchange for Achilles' prize, Briseis. He likes Chryseis because she is "more than Clytaemnestra," his wife. "Chryseis is just as good in her shape, physique, intelligence, or work. Still I'm prepared to give her back" (v.150). But Agamemnon does not want to remain empty-handed, so he will give Chryseis back only if he receives something else in return—Achilles' own prize.

Achilles remains in a corner as Agamemnon speaks, trying to handle his rage. When Agamemnon finishes, Achilles addresses the king: "Noble son (…) we'll give you three or four times as much (…). Send the girl back now" (v.130). But nothing can convince Agamemnon to change his mind.

I.3. Behind the Dialogue

The scene described above is a great example of the non-dialogue that occurs when rage dominates a situation. The appearance of dialogue between Achilles and Agamemnon is a delusion. The words of the dialogue do not matter: feelings, guts, and the will to power are the real protagonists. Agamemnon immediately senses what is at stake here: an *agon* (fight) of wills. Gadamer (1989) would say that *Sichverstaending* (self-understanding) or mutual understanding is impossible for them in this context. In the kind of conversation Achilles and Agamemnon are having, the communication of intelligible content is secondary to bringing about a transformation in their *Grundbefindlichkeit* (basic pathos); they cannot reach a basic felt understanding between each other. Their basic pathos of rage and hostility prevents them from understanding the content of what each other is each saying.

In Section 477 of Nietzsche's book *Will to Power*, he writes that reasoning is a mere facade that conceals what is really going on: "Thinking as the theorists of cognition assume it to be, is nowhere to be found." For Homer, the location of thought is not in the eviscerated mind but in a character's *phrenos, stenos,* and *thumos* (the chest, viscera, and spirit).

There is no actual conversation between Achilles and Agamemnon: instead, there is a contest to decide which man will prevail as the "best of the Acheans" (v.412). The pathos that guides the dialogue is a sheer "will to power," in Nietzschean terms. Their goal is to fulfill their *moron* (destiny) and prove themselves worthy of their social status. They want to show their army that they are good leaders.

The dialogue is thus a fight, aiming to demonstrate who is the more powerful of the two. The reasons that Achilles gives Agamemnon for sending back the girl are meant to suppress his will and show his failure as a leader.

Agamemnon answers "Achilles you're a fine man, like a god" (v.141). What he really seems to mean, however, is "I hate you and I do not buy the good-hearted image of yourself that you are trying to sell me now." His next words prove that he has the power to do whatever he wants: "I'll take someone else's prize, maybe yours, and I have the power to do it!" (vv.136–9) "You'll not trick me or win me over with your words" (v.130).

In Nietzschean terms, the will to power leads Agamemnon to undermine the possibility of rational exchange with Achilles. He feels duped by Achilles' eloquence and so behaves aggressively and greedily. He is ready to send back "that fair-complexioned" (v.155) girl only if he gets another girl from the Trojans.

This proposal is too much for Achilles: his patience deserts him. "Shameless!"—he erupts—"You insatiable creature. […]. How can any Achaean obey you willingly […] I have no fight with them. They never stole my bulls or horses […] So I'll return home now to Pythia. It's far better to sail back in my curved ships. I don't fancy staying here unvalued, to pile up riches, treasures just for you. […] I'll send her back to my own ships with my crew" (vv.160–70).

Achilles' rage grows so great that he starts behaving like Agamemnon, who proclaims: "But I, I will be there in person at your tents to take Briseis in all her beauty, your own prize—so you can learn just how much greater I am than you, and the next man up may shrink from matching words with me, from hoping to rival Agamemnon strength for strength!" (vv.183–7). Achilles replies: "I will fetch her in person […] You'll see just how much better I am" (v.203).

I.4. Love, Power, and Anger

At this point, the story is apparently focusing on the will to power. I will leave aside the reifying way in which women are treated in the story. The supposedly romantic love that both men feel for Briseis seems to be a mere tool for showing their power. It is their motive for *being in rage*—or, more precisely, for *becoming* that rage. The truth is that no one really has the power in this quarrel. Despite trying to prove the contrary, Achilles and Agamemnon must both obey the will of Apollo and the other gods. Their love for Briseis seems to be an excuse for manifesting their strength. Their wills prevail over a genuine sense of love; only arrogance and rage are left. They just want to defend their social status in front of their followers.

Horace, an excellent critic of Homer, would disagree with my interpretation. In the *Epistles* 1.2 (9–13), Horace expresses his belief that both Agamemnon and Achilles were in love with, or at least had warm feelings for, Briseis. According to Horace, Agamemnon instinctively knows how important Briseis is to Achilles, which is why he uses her to attack Achilles in his *vulnus* (wound).

Achilles appears indifferent toward Briseis in the initial verses, and even uses her as a way to diminish Agamemnon's power. Later, however, he calls her his "*alochon thumarea*" ("the bride of his heart") (Book IX, 336), and declares that he loves her "*ek thumou phileo*" ("with all his heart") (Book IX, 343).[2]

Horace's reading of the first book is very interesting—it is Agamemnon who is consumed by a negative anger in his eyes, whereas Achilles is overcome by ardent love. Achilles' rage, in Horace's reading, is a positive rage: it is free from jealousy and aimed only at defending those whom he loves.

I.5. The Epiphany of Love: Athena

We left our heroes amid an excruciating dialogue. Horace reassures us by saying that Achilles *is* in love with Briseis. Agamemnon does not want to compromise his

leadership in front of the Achaean forces, however. He needs to prove his status, and so he intensifies his challenge to Achilles.

Achilles faces an impossible choice. If he ignores Agamemnon's provocations, he will be obliged as Agamemnon's solder to fight a war that would be unfair for him and the army he leads. If he gives in to the provocations, he will drag the Argive army into a civil war against their own king. On the one hand, he understands that any decision implies the shedding of more innocent blood. On the other hand, he must do *something*—he cannot simply run away.

Achilles is now called to make a decision that will alter his life and the lives of his people. He cannot fight *for* a man as vain as Agamemnon, and he cannot fight *against* this man, as he would be leading other warriors to certain death. What is left for him to do? *Deus ex machina*. "At that moment, Athena came down from heaven" with this advice: "Control yourself. Obey" (v.230). *This* is for me the moment of highest love in the first book. "Obey." Obey what? Love, in its purest principle.

The goddess Athena's character is beautifully described by Kerényi (1954) and Otto (1974). She is bound to strong personalities, and is gifted with sharp sight and *metis* (intelligence). Odysseus seems to be her favorite Homeric hero because of his resourcefulness and practical rationality (*phronesis*). But here she decides to help Achilles because she wants to counsel his wrath. *Nous kai dianoia* (practical wisdom) is what she usually commands. She counsels people to abstain from action and just to persist—to defend their destiny against conflicting powers and the deluge of disorienting feelings that might take possession of their life.

Achilles ponders (μερμηρίζει indicates anxious deliberation) and decides to follow Athena's advice.[3] Divine decisions cannot be separated from those of humans (Lesky 1961, 14). This part of the poem represents a moment of love. Achilles chooses to obey an inner principle of humanity, a primordial sense of wisdom that calls for his authenticity to emerge and be used for an ego-less purpose.

The moment exemplifies *authentic wrath*. "Authenticity" is a Greek word that comes from *autos* (self) and *hentos* (doer); it signifies the human ability to be ourselves. According to Snell (1953) and Dodds (1951), Achilles needs Athena to make a decision because his whole self is in her words.[4] For Snell and others, Homeric heroes represent interdependent parts of the psyche; they are an assembly of interdependent psychic forces that act in varying interdependent directions. While for Voigt (1934) and Sharples (1983), Achilles converses with his own self when he talks to Athena. He addresses her with the word *thumos*, courage. Here and elsewhere (*Iliad* 11, 403–12; *Iliad* 22, 98–131) the hero addresses his own *thumos* ("Why has my *thumos* spoken with me, thus?")[5] with the possessive "my," which is accompanied by *philos,* "dear" (Sharples 1983, 2) to indicate the form of intimate bonding love that he establishes with it. Being in contact with his rage also puts Achilles in loving, intimate contact with his authentic self. From this point, he can feel his way toward the right decision—the decision that will save his social

status (*kleos*) and pursue his destiny (*moron*). Achilles' blind rage vanishes, making space for a courageous rage. This courageous rage connects him with a self that points him to the most ethical choice. From this position only can he choose in favor of love.

Trilling (1970, 3) defines Achilles as an authentic and sincere hero. According to him, the word "sincerity" derives from Latin: *sine cera* (without wax). We are sincere when we are close to our own heart, without any filter. Sincerity is the consequence of our actual feelings. The authentic hero fights for what their heart is feeling, fulfilling their authentic self through their deeds.

The problem is that the true self is usually at odds with societal demands. In this case, Achilles is split between what is good for his honor and what is good for his army. When Athena manifests, Achilles is torn. He is attempting to overcome his alienation from his real calling. The presence of Athena appears at first as a *form* of alienation, but this goddess represents part of his psychic energy.

In the context of his "social phenomenology," Laing (1960) examines the problem of alienation and invisibility as coming from inter-experience. According to Laing, every behavior is a function of inter-psychic experience that aims at expansion. At times, this expansion comes at the expense of elements of this collective experience. Even when we love, we can put into practice a mechanism of transpersonal invalidation in which our behavior and the interpretation we provide of it projects itself onto another person's behavior and alienates their lived experience. For example, different people can witness the same accident but each one of them will describe it in a different way. In family or other societal structures the consequences of this phenomenon are quite significant. There is a need to have one story concerning a specific event and so only one narrative will be accepted. The other points of views of the same story will disappear. Yet, if our story is never narrated, heard, or seen we might start feeling invalidated or disconnected with our deep self. Recovering the wholeness of being human through relationships requires an effort (1960, 53) to recover our voice that only the powerful instrument of fantasy (1960, 31) and fidelity to our senses can offer.

Achilles comes back to himself through the intervention of Athena, his inner voice, who speaks to him and helps him to orient his true self toward his original experience. She helps him to escape from his blind rage.

I consider this moment to be the most ethical expression of *philein* (human love). It is in this moment of rage, in which Achilles is accused of things that he never did or desired, that he willingly seeks for a way to save lives. At the very moment at which the nonsensical whims of an arrogant man undermine his sense of self, Achilles finds his divine voice. Athena's voice inspires him to a higher sense of humanity. This sense of humanity is faithful to his own nature and respects other human beings. "Goddess, men should follow your instructions, though angry in their hearts. It's better so" (I, 212–13). Achilles thus overcomes his blind anger and connects with the animosity that will let him obey his heroic destiny.

No one can see Achilles talking to Athena. This brief dialogue between the hero and the goddess is completely inward: it is one of those moments out of time in which Homeric characters try to reach their own deepest layer. They do so to find a principle of orientation that may solve their existential impasse. This is the moment in which real love finally encounters its heartbeat.

The love that Achilles openly expresses in this moment of rage springs from his love for his true self as an expression of humanity. Athena operates secretly in the souls of Greek heroes. She is Achilles' wisdom, telling him to stop fighting and "obey."

Love is behind all this. Love is in the divinity that calls for obedience and respect for humanity. Love is in Achilles' decision to subdue his instinctive fury and instead consider what the right thing to do is for his true self and his people. This quality of love and self-respect marks the difference between positive and negative rage.

I.6. Love, Force, and Rage

Simone Weil describes the *Iliad* as "the poem of force" (*bie*) (1940–1). By force, she means the violence with which warriors engage with each other. Ricoeur takes a step forward regarding this meaning: "Power exists when people act together: it vanishes when they disperse […] hence the strong temptation to substitute violence for power" (1983, 68). The wrath (*menis*) of Achilles is woven into his community's destinies, as many warriors depend on him. This dependence is why he needs to find love in his wrath instead of being consumed by it. His wrath is not only force: it is also *power*—power over his and other people's lives.

Achilles' rage acquires meaning when he finds the authentic courage to act in favor of selfless love and against his ego's demands. Mettzer writes that "Force (as polyvalently exemplified by Achilles) is what is called today a 'force field,' where philosophically the universe is seen as a vast system ruled by the interaction of energies" (Mettzer, 615). As in Snell's and Sharple's hypothesis, Athena's voice is part of Achilles' voice just as Achilles exists as an interconnected part of a universal psychic system. Furthermore, Athena's voice does not come from outer space, but from Achilles' heart, "talking to him." Achilles is not always faithful to Athena's voice, but listening to it in that moment is a moral imperative. The highest meaning of Achilles' rage is the moral vigor of interpersonal respect. He knows he is a powerful individual; he knows he can single-handedly change the course of the Trojan war. Given this knowledge, Achilles chooses to embody a rage that contemplates love and authenticity. Knox writes that "no civilization, no matter how rich, no matter how refined, can long survive once it loses the power to meet force with equal or superior force" (1994, 37). Achilles is aware that he is this force's point of convergence. Only if the force flows into authentic love (*philia*) can he be heroic, in the sense of fulfilling the destiny (*moira*) of that locus of being.

II. Today's Interpretation of Achilles' Wrath: Showcase

I will here present three cases of rage. By doing so, I will consider when rage is the blind *ate* (destruction) described above, and when conversely it is the courageous rage (*thumos*) conducive to ethical choices that connect us to our deeper source of love.

II.1. Denis' Call

Denis was a young client in his mid-30s who lived in Northern Europe. He presented himself as a successful professional. He left his country in his early 30s, working first in Eastern Europe where he enjoyed life and built his career. He then left for a better position elsewhere. I was struck by the amount of care Denis showed for his appearance. His eyebrows were carefully sculpted and his hair always well-kept. His skin tanned even during the Northern European winter.

Denis came to my office because he had the Sunday blues—he was sad and low on Sunday afternoons. By examining his relational life, I realized that he might be lonely, although he never explicitly said so. I do not recall Denis willingly giving me any indication that could lead me to think of him as weak. He was very concerned not to be judged as morally bad or psychologically weak. He went so far as to say that if he had a girlfriend, Sundays would be much more fun; that was the closest he came to an admission of social weakness during our meetings.

Denis' father had died a few years ago, but their relationship was not good: he left when Denis was young. According to him, his father was not a successful man because he had lived his life being manipulated by his partner. His father was a weak man in Denis' eyes. Denis grew up with his grandparents and his mother, with whom he had a good relationship in terms of mutual care. However, he complained about his mother's immaturity and her demands on him. Denis had numerous relationships with women but never fell in love. He had never been loyal to anyone (although he seemed unaware of this fact until he related his stories to me). Nor had he ever felt truly connected to anyone. I did not establish any deep connection to him during our meetings.

The most authentic trait that Denis revealed to me was his ongoing rage. I met with him only six times before I realized that I was not the right fit for him. He related to me (and to his ex-partners, I believe) by creating an ongoing argument whose goal was to prove him right; during the argument the interlocutor was attacked on something personal. I think that he felt abandoned, and developed narcissistic traits that pushed him to find connection through rage. The rage of others was also an expression of care toward him.

The problem is that most of Denis' rage was blind and pointless for the people around him: they were exhausted by his behavior. When his quiet rage triggered the rage of his partner or interlocutor, he felt recharged and at home. But that energy did not carry any lasting meaning; it was only temporary. I had the impression

that Denis' rage was an ethical call to connect with something deeper in himself, but he used it as a blind instrument of destruction that left him feeling alone. The force behind his rage was testing other people to see how much they truly cared about him. They were in no position to win that test, however, because winning it would have challenged his ego—which would have been unacceptable for him. He therefore kept recreating the perfect setup for repeated abandonment. His rage was a problem that manifested itself as an existential call on Sunday afternoons.

Denis had to make a choice about his vulnerability. That choice would open him up to connecting to his partners and himself. While we worked together, he became aware of his rage but could not assign meaning to it. He raged against himself too—hence the Sunday blues he felt when he was alone.

II.2. Dimitri's Blind Rage

Dimitri's wife left him after 12 years together. They had never really had a stable relationship. When he called me, she was with another man—but he wanted her back at home. She was dating this other man, he said, and was not at all interested in bringing their family back together. Dimitri was extremely frustrated. His rage erupted so often in our sessions that it was rarely possible to give him feedback. I did not engage in any useful conversation with him because he just wanted to vent; we did not conclude anything particularly substantial during our meetings. I tried to broaden his perspective so that he could see his wife and himself as independent individuals, each living their destiny (*moron*). But he was stuck in the challenges that life was throwing at him, like Achilles stuck in Agamemnon's provocations. He was far from understanding the deepest roots of his rage; he just wanted to reunite with his wife (whom, on his own admission, he did not love). Dimitri was fully absorbed in a blind rage that led him to make poor choices with his love life. He would not see his wife as an independent entity: she was his spoils of war, his reason to feel alive and whole. His fixation and need for control increasingly fed his destructive rage. Coming back to himself was extremely hard.

II.3. James and Jill's Courageous Rage: Listen to Athena!

James and Jill were a charming young couple. They came to my office after James had just received a serious health diagnosis; Jill was worried for his life. I met with them for over a year with good results. Through philosophical counseling, we realized that James' life contained an important nucleus of rage that had repercussions on his health. His relationship with his narcissistic mother was very draining for him; the couple had no idea how to build boundaries around this relationship. James and Jill's rage imploded in self-harming behaviors that gave them both chronic health conditions. We were able to work together well. I decided not to address the rage first. I wanted them to see and connect with their

bodily well-being; they had become blind to the link between their choices and their bodily health. They could not see how stress manifested in specific choices that affected their well-being. For example, working late with few breaks put stress on their back and their eyes, negatively affecting their moods. I therefore initially focused on the most pressing call for attention; we established physical health routines so that they could understand the connection between their choices and their bodily well-being. We then started talking about rage. James mentioned his mother; Jill chimed in when she felt it was right to do so. I educated them regarding predictable reactions in response to narcissistic patterns and helped them to create a journal so they could track the reasons for their rage. I also encouraged them to establish clear limits beyond which they could not extend themselves without risking harm to their bodily and psychological well-being. Given their physical conditions, they understood that their life was in concrete danger if they did not find a way to contain the anger of James' mother—and, more importantly, their anger toward her.

In talking to me, they saw that anger for the first time. Their blind rage was transformed into something more visible; they were compelled to put in their feelings into words—feelings that were permeated with guilt and shame. James' mother would use shame to control her grown-up son and keep his wife at a distance. Jill's desire to protect James' feelings, and James' sense of guilt and shame, had blocked James' rage. This obstruction caused bodily tension in him, threatening the quality of his life.

By giving words to their rage, James and Jill soon found themselves faced with an ethical choice about love. For Jill, the ethical call was easier; it consisted in discerning the right amount of distance between her and her mother-in-law. For James, the ethical call was more complex and was strongly bound up with his identity. James' ethical choice was first to accept that he had been raised by a narcissistic mother. This was hard for him to accept because it meant he had been deprived of the caring attention that every child deserves. He could no longer deceive himself in order to justify his mother's absence and rejection. It would have been easier for him to fall back into his usual shame and guilt rather than to let the abandonment and lack of care sink in. Second, James had to overcome his ego in his desire to prove to her that *he* was the perfect son and *she* was the lousy mother. He had to listen to Athena—that inner voice encouraging him to give himself the caring life he wanted for himself and his family. Despite these challenges, James found the courage to make an ethical choice about his love. He had to choose to dedicate his energy to himself and his wife. It was not easy, but James' temperament and humility helped him.

II.4. An Epicurean Exercise to Connect with Healthy Rage

I think that philosophy, Epicureanism in particular, can help us orient our feelings of rage in the right direction. This kind of philosophy tells us how to balance our

judgment toward rage and be able to recognize when rage is a means to acting lovingly toward our self.

Although the Epicurean theory of emotions seems to be incomplete, there does exist an interesting treatise *On Anger* written by Philodemus.[6] In this treatise, Philodemus engages in a discussion with Stoic and Aristotelian sources.[7] On the one hand, he acknowledges Chrysippus' belief according to which philosophy has a therapeutic effect on the emotional problems that afflict our soul.[8] On the other hand, he questions the Stoic and Aristotelian approach to anger (XXXVII). For the Stoics, anger is always bad because it generates upheaval in the individual's soul and does not allow inner peace. Conversely, Aristotle believes—like the Homeric heroes—that anger is sometimes necessary to stand up for yourself. In general, for all these philosophical directions it is important to understand what kind of rage is worth acting on.

My third client had to own his anger to make a courageous choice that allowed him to feel one with himself. He decided not to let his rage undermine his well-being and his marriage. He felt that something had to change, and his rage gave him a direction for that change.

Dimitri's blind rage and Denis' ongoing frustration were forms of distraction from the real rage they were experiencing. Their real rage stemmed from a strong sense of abandonment that left a void within—from Denis' father and from Dimitri's wife and parents.

According to Philodemus, we need to distinguish between natural (φυσική) and empty (κενή) anger (οργή) in order to see the latter as pointless (LSJ S.v.1.2). To understand this classification and be able to apply it in our daily life we need to look at Epicurus' classification of desires:[9]

> Of desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural but not necessary, and some are neither natural nor necessary, but come about depending on empty belief.
>
> *(KD 29)*

According to Epicureans, the main difference between necessary and unnecessary desires concerns false beliefs. Every desire depends on a belief; when this belief is false, then the desire is harmful and linked to things that have little importance in life. The necessity of the belief upon which a desire is founded correlates to the increase or decrease in our vitality that the achievement of the desire would bring about. A desire is necessary if we cannot be happy, healthy, or even alive if we do not have the object of that desire (Ep. ad Men. 127). Such a desire is necessary because achieving that object makes our survival possible. Anything that would generate pain if it were not achieved is natural and necessary. Food is a natural and necessary desire for us, for instance. However, the type of food does make a difference: having a kilo of refined caviar might be natural but not necessary

because our vitality and well-being would not change if we ate it. Indeed, it would decrease if we ate too much.

Anything that is not natural and not necessary (KD 30) is considered empty (κενός). If "nothing" is the answer to the following questions—"What will I get if what I seek through this desire is achieved? And what if it is not?" (VS 71)—then the desire is based on false beliefs: it is empty. According to this point of view, life's ultimate goal is to reach a static condition of pleasure. Any desire that changes these conditions should be rejected as pointless. Any manifestation of greediness or caprice is only harmful to our well-being.

Philodemus' classification of anger reflects Epicurus' classification of desires. Anger is of course different from desires.[10] But if we exclude *ate* (blind anger), then we can see how anger is also based on beliefs or judgments. Dimitri was angry because his wife cheated on him and he wanted her back. His anger was based on the belief that if his wife were loyal and still married to him, he could live a pain-free life. Is this belief true? We challenged the belief during our sessions, and he acknowledged that it was not true. Unfortunately, his blind rage was so strong that it took all the space away from the courageous rage, stopping it from flowing in a meaningful ethical direction.

In VIII.20–27, Philodemus describes anger as "a kindling, swelling, irritation, and indignation, together with a fierce desire to pursue and contend with the person, if one can." In empty anger, the object of contempt is not visible—I'm angry with the world because I do not have what I deserve. Take for instance Denis' rage. This rage did not have an object: it was an underlying mood that accompanied his intimate interactions with himself and others. "Nobody understands me" is a typical expression of this feeling. "I will vindicate myself for all the wrongs I have received" is another statement of this false belief. This form of anger produces a physical state in the individual that will not be lessened if the vague object of desire is achieved—quite the contrary. Denis jumped from one relationship to another without finding any pleasure or desire. He got what he thought he wanted—a successful image of himself—but this achievement did not give him peace. He was often bothered by some defect that the other person supposedly imposed on him: "she was not smart enough," "she put on weight," "my friends are too lazy to organize an evening together," etc.

In the positive form of anger, achieving my desire would make my life easier—but in the negative form of anger, achieving my desire would double my anger. The achievement would just make my hunger for meaning and fulfillment even stronger. Achieving the belief that is behind the empty anger would lead me to hate everyone in the world and become an angrier person; this behavior would eventually affect my well-being. Empty anger comes from a bad disposition (από διαθέσεως γίνεται πα(μ)πονήρου), which if repeated and left free to control our life can only lead to a bad (κακόν) outcome. This was the disposition that Denis and Dimitri had: it swallowed the good things in their lives.

Stoics have a generally negative judgement of anger, considering it to be a sort of madness that takes away something important from our life.[11] They encourage us to refrain from it. Aristotle and Epicureans instead assign a positive value to anger that achieves justice (Kemp & Strongman 1995). Without being too punitive or too indulgent toward our anger, we can develop tools to stop and consider what kind of anger we are experiencing and how to handle it. I believe that in any case it is important to acknowledge one's own anger and to reflect on it. It might at times be worthwhile to act upon it, but only in an ethical way—that is, after having reflected on it and decided on the most responsible way to lovingly obey its voice. Connecting with your own anger is sometimes the most straightforward way to connect with your *self*.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the role that rage plays in our lives, especially when we have to make choices concerning our love life. Being lovingly connected with ourselves and others is an choice we need to make—but a choice that is sometimes made difficult by circumstances.

In this chapter, I used Achilles' story to show how the negative form of destructive rage (*ate*) will never help us to make this connection. It increases our distance from our integrity and self love. Courageous rage (*thumos*), on the other hand, pushes us to the limit of our soul and asks us for a quiet obedience toward the deepest sources of our self. In the *Iliad*, obedience is exemplified by Athena's voice. Being able to obey what is right is not easy, but it can set a chain of good choices in motion that puts our life in order. To make my thesis clearer, I used cases from my practice to demonstrate the different qualities of rage. I proposed the Epicurean theory on rage, to help us understand what lies at the core of our rage and what we can do to make it less blind and empty. If we trace the meaningful beliefs that sustain our rage, we can transform blind rage into courageous rage. This helps us to make good choices about what we want and how we want to embody the life we have been given.

Character List

Achilles—The son of the military man Peleus and the sea-nymph Thetis. The most powerful warrior in the *Iliad,* Achilles commands the Myrmidons, soldiers from his homeland of Phthia in Greece. Achilles is proud and headstrong: he takes offense easily and reacts with blistering indignation when he thinks that his honor has been slighted. Achilles' wrath at Agamemnon for taking the maiden Briseis from him is the main subject of the *Iliad*.

Agamemnon (also called "Atrides")—king of Mycenae and leader of the Achaean army; brother of King Menelaus of Sparta. Arrogant and often selfish, Agamemnon provides the Achaeans with strong but sometimes

reckless and self-serving leadership. Like Achilles, he lacks consideration and forethought. His tactless appropriation of Achilles' war prize, Briseis, creates a crisis for the Achaeans. Achilles, insulted, withdraws from the war.

Chryseis—Chryses' daughter.

Briseis—Achilles' war-prize. When Agamemnon is forced to return Chryseis to her father, he takes Briseis as compensation, sparking Achilles' great rage.

Chryses—A priest of Apollo in a Trojan-allied town; the father of Chryseis, whom Agamemnon takes as a war prize.

Ethical Takeaway

Not all anger is bad. Although bad anger might possess you and derail your life, good anger could make you a more loving person. Reflect on the call at the root of your anger and consider whether it is based on a true belief. Ask yourself: what will I really obtain if I achieve what I seek through this feeling? If the answer is 'nothing', then your anger is blind and not worthy of being pursued. When experiencing the positive form of anger, achieving your desire will make your life more meaningful. When experiencing the negative form of anger, however, achieving your desire will double your anger: it will make your hunger for fulfillment even stronger.

Exercises

To distinguish empty rage from natural and necessary rage, sit down and take three deep breaths. In your mind, trace the moments of the past few days in which you felt rage. Try to see yourself in those moments and understand what triggered that feeling in you. Write these moments down on a short list. Pass the moments through the Epicurean self-examination: ask yourself in which of the four categories your moments of rage fall into. Then circle the moments of natural and necessary rage and allow yourself to connect with that rage. See if and how you want to act on it and how you can break free from it.

Reading Rage in Your Daily Life[12]

1. Read the following transcripts.
2. Identify the layers of rage emerging in the interviews. The analysis might be structured according to the following questions: Where do you see blind rage and where do you see courageous rage? Is this rage connected to self-expression and identity? What are the moral implications of that act of rage? Is this rage connected to love and the social role that the participants have?
3. After undertaking this exercise on these transcripts, you can write your own transcript and do the same exercise on yourself. This will help you to see the belief behind your rage and ponder what is worth pursuing.

Transcript #1

So, here it goes, Susi, a personal description of me being in rage and its ethical consequences. A friend of mine recently directed a number of accusations and even insults in my direction, concerning how I had acted towards her. The tone and content of what she said felt hurtful, as it was done without raising questions or clarifying what had occurred. Since this felt painful/hurtful, I reacted by getting angered and then by getting enraged since I felt that this was a betrayal of our trust and friendship, apart from feeling the need to defend against what I felt was unjust on her side. I then proceeded to write a lengthy response in which I took apart every little bit of what she had addressed at me and pointed out inconsistencies. Under the sensation of being furious (which I take to be the same as rage), I felt physically contracted but in "fight" type of manner. My words and overall expression were rather cold and dry and at some point it felt like I was beginning to bully her instead of rebuking what I felt was off in that situation. At this point I became suspicious of what I was doing as it felt like I was reacting more strongly than felt necessary. There was a drive to cause emotional damage and hurt (or even destruction), a type of blind lashing out so as to shut her up and scold her. As I became suspicious of my reaction, I stopped writing and reviewed the lengthy response that was waiting to be sent. Looking at it I realized that it would serve a sense of justice that I have but that it would land in the wrong place, as it was too much burdened by the initial rage which I experienced and the desire that came out of it to bully the other person to shut up. The ethical consequences of this seem to be that there occurred a type of reduction of the other person that I felt was first addressed towards me and which I then decided to respond to in the same (and stronger) manner. The same thing that I was enraged at (not having been asked for clarification) was what I was about to do. There was the desire to cause the other to experience guilt and out of that—remorse. And there was also an impulse to belittle her and what she had said (as wrong as that felt). When I dropped this attitude, I reached out to her in a calmer way, without nitpicking every thing she said and simply stated that I was not going to go for that type of communication and that I would leave things there (this felt right in this situation and given where we're at currently in our friendship).

Transcript #2

I think I have only experienced true rage once in my life. It took complete control of me and I was barely able to act independently. I was in a state of constant battle between letting myself be in control or completely snapping and having no control whatsoever over myself. On top of everything else I was feeling, I felt afraid, I felt I was tiptoeing on the edge of sanity and was in a constant state of losing balance. I didn't know what would happen if I let myself go. Would I turn into chaos? Start ripping up the grass around me, running around screaming? Or

would I just collapse? Lose consciousness entirely and fall to the ground right here in the street? As with any fundamental, life-long issues that a person has, I have to go a ways back in my life to properly detail why I fell into this rage state. One week before I turned eight (I know, we're going *way* back) my father left my mother and I for another family. These days, this isn't that uncommon of a situation, and ultimately, I think I would have been fine with this if it weren't for what were to follow. My father and I never really had a relationship when he was around so his leaving, while upsetting at the time, probably wouldn't have been so detrimental. I have always had a great support group (friends) and I believe that I am a pretty strong person. However, his leaving did lead to much much worse things. The court had decided that my father, who was a fairly wealthy doctor and a high ranking officer in the navy, had to pay child support, alimony, and for our home at least until I turned 18. He was also supposed to "have me" every other weekend. That last part is almost funny to me seeing as how I saw him maybe twice ever again, despite our living in the same city, and both times I had to take the initiative for us to be together. My mother is fairly crippled and can't stand or walk around for much more than an hour and couldn't really get a job on her own to support us. A few years later, I think when I was maybe 11, my father stopped paying alimony. Since my mother wasn't working, we couldn't afford a lawyer to take him to court to make him pay. A couple more years later he stopped paying for the house. We had already been budgeting pretty hard after losing the alimony, but now, we were living in real poverty. We still had a home but other than that, we were living pretty sparse. Skipping meals was not uncommon for my mom and I. We never spoke about it, because we knew the other would worry, but we often would just say we weren't hungry. I wasn't able to go on the same trips, camps, or join the same clubs as my friends at the time because we just didn't have the money. This was very difficult to explain to kids at my high school as it was a mostly upper-middle class area. I took to lying about my situation pretty frequently. It was just easier. Maybe I was lying to myself more than to others but either way it felt good being able to avoid my problems from home. Then, one year later, he stopped paying child support. He was now contributing absolutely nothing to people who already had nothing. I started working so we could sustain ourselves but there is only so much you can do at 14 or 15 and having school every day. We got by, but it wasn't by much. When I was 18, I saw my father on the news in court. Apparently he had gotten himself involved in medicare fraud by partnering with a known felon. I knew it wasn't his idea, he wasn't smart enough in business to even know how to commit fraud, but I also thought that now that he's in jail he can't hurt my life anymore. I was in college for a couple years when I got the call that triggered the rage.

A couple weeks before the rage, my mother called and told me that my father had written her a letter. He hadn't communicated with her in over ten years. I was stunned to hear that he had reached out at all. What followed surprised me even further. He wrote that he had finally realized how much he had hurt us. He went

on to say that he was even sorry for doing what he had done over the years and that he wanted to make up for it. I was so confused. Not quite happy, just more blown away. I had no idea what the consequences of this could be. I definitely was in a better mood regarding him. And then …

A couple weeks later, I was walking from class to my girlfriend's apartment in the afternoon. I was still on campus when I got a call from my mom. I remember her voice being afraid. She explained to me that she had gotten a letter in the mail from my father. It said that he did not mean anything he sent in that letter, that he sent that impulsively and without thinking. It said that he has done nothing wrong and that she needed to stop contacting him?! My mother never had so that was confusing. Until the letter went on to say that, "we" have decided that "we" will be making no further payments to you. This was also odd because to my understanding, we weren't receiving anything from them anyway. Also the "we" he kept writing was referring to him and that vile woman he married. I already loathed this person and the fact that she had any say in what went on in my life infuriated me. Attached to the letter was a legal document. It reflected that that woman had put a loan on our house to bail my father out of jail. I was mad when I heard my father kept writing "we" this "we" that, but when I found out that she had put a loan on my home, to bail her idiot husband out of jail, I was enraged. My mother asked if I was okay, I distinctly remember responding to her for the rest of the call with short, one worded answers. Shortly thereafter, the call ended and I was left to myself.

My mind was racing and dead at the same time. I allowed myself to let my hopes sky rocket only a couple weeks ago only to be crushed further down than I had ever been. I was mad at myself for allowing that to happen. But I think I was still madder at my father and the woman he married. Those two incompetent, cowardly fools had literally stripped away everything I owned but the clothes on my back because they couldn't manage a proper business. My heartbeat was racing. My blood began to boil, I developed rashes on the parts of my body where the veins were closest to the skin. This has happened to me before but only under great stress. My vision even began to narrow, my peripheries were black. My left eye was twitching. My fists were clenched, it felt like every muscle in my body was tense. My jaw was unbearably tight. My jaw is often the first to react when I am stressed but this was a new level of tightness that was fairly painful. I felt powerful. Every step I took felt like the earth shuddered underneath me. My breathing was spaced and loud. All the while I felt numb. I felt like if I were to be hit by a car right now, my facial expression might not even change. I wanted to scream. I don't think I have ever wanted to scream so much. Revenge filled my head. Drastic, irreversible, radical revenge. I would rather not bring up the details but, it was a rather well-thought-out, seemingly realistic plan for revenge. By the time I reached my girlfriend's apartment, I was still enraged. I gave her a small glimpse into what I was feeling and why, but I didn't want to scare her so I kept

most of it to myself. She was always very perceptive and knew I was withholding, but knew not to dig too far. She tried to comfort me as much as she could. I think I studied for a while at her place before one of us had to go and I went back to my own apartment. I don't remember much of what else was going on outside of my head. I don't think I even really felt her touch. I was still in this state of rage and still didn't feel like I had control. I felt consumed by a deep, penetrating darkness. I went to sleep, and woke in the morning still feeling absolutely enraged. I began preparing myself to enact my revenge. I knew the impact of my enacting would go beyond just myself and my target. I tried as much as I could to ignore this, because my rage was more important. But, as the day went on, I think I finally snapped out of it. It was no quick task, but it slowly started to melt away. I thought of everyone that would be affected by my fit of rage. I thought how much damage I would be doing to myself and how much I had already done due to someone else's fault. I then began to think of how much more enjoyable it would be to get revenge simply by making it through this trial despite how impressively difficult it would be. I would not be pulled down to their level. I am better than them. I am more than a product of my situation. I then became horrified of the demons I had just let loose from within myself. How long had that been festering inside me? What am I capable of? Well, if I was able to overcome that then, I really feel I can overcome just about anything. The darkness I experienced that day closely followed me for months, possibly years. Despite, not being enraged anymore, I still felt that heavy darkness of what I kept inside, and I think I feel it even today. It's not as immediately present as it once was sure but I certainly have not looked at myself the same since then. I trust myself both more and less having followed that situation. I trust myself more because I made it through that possession, if you will, without truly doing any damage. I trust myself less though because I was even capable of entertaining the thoughts that I had. I am typically a very open person but this darkness is not something I very willingly share. It is the only thing I have kept to only two people.

Notes

1 As Strongman shows, "Unfortunately, a difference persists with the way in which female anger was treated in ancient philosophy. Ancient philosophers rarely refer to women's anger at all, according to Simon Kemp and K. T. Strongman perhaps because their works were not intended for women. Some of them that discuss it, such as Seneca, considered women to be more prone to anger than men" (Kemp & Strongman 1995, 397).

2 For the Romans, Achilles became the exemplar of the epic warrior as a lover. The most significant instances are found in Horace's *Carmen* 2. 4. 2–4 and *Propertius* 2. 8. 35–6, and Ovid's *Amores* 2. 8. 11, *Ars amatoria* 2. 711, and *Heroides* 3.

3 According to Russo (2012), in this the unusual scene beginning that follows μερμηρίζω "whether/or" with μερμηρίζω, Homer expresses "how to" and combines personal choice with divine intervention.

4 The most influential interpretations of Homeric psychology come from Snell and Dodds. Along with other scholars, they emphasize the Homeric heroes' lack of coherent and whole selves and accordingly their inability to make their own decisions (Snell 1953, Ch. 1; Dodds 1951, 15 f. 1). Dodds notably differs from Snell on this point. He finds the idea that Homeric man lacks consciousness of autonomous choice "misleadingly expressed," and clarifies that the absence of a concept of "free will" does not prevent a Homeric character from distinguishing "between actions originated by the ego and those which he attributed to divine Intervention" (Dodds 1951, 20). These views have been criticized by Lloyd-Jones (1973) and Lesky (1961), among others. In his *Göttliche und Menschliche Motivation im homerischen Epos*, Lesky stresses that the Ancient Greek lack of a word for "self" does not mean that the concept of personal identity did not exist in the period. Bernard Williams (1993) criticizes Snell, observing that he uses a post-Cartesian sense of self that presupposes the presence of a thinking mind as a self separate from the body and applies it to the Homeric heroes. Whereas Snell argues that Homeric heroes are an assembly of independent psychic forces, Fraenkel (1963) considers the Homeric character to be "remarkably simple" and whole. If anything, the boundaries that separate the hero from the external world are a little blurry.

5 The formulas in use are as follows: as a monologue spoken aloud with ὡ μοι εγὡ (II. 11, 401; 17, 90; 21, 552; 22, 97; Od. 5, 354; 407; 464; 6,118), and addressed to the hero's θυμός by the formulas ὀχθήσας δ'άρα είπε προς ὃν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν; and 14, 20 where δαιζόμενος κατά θυμόν διχθάδια replaces μερμηρίζω.

6 It is probably from the diatribe as a genre that Philodemus derives the rhetorical and even theatrical mode of the first part of the treatise (I–XXXIII).

7 He refers to Chrysippus' theory of emotions (Book IV) and responds to the Aristotelian theory of emotions.

8 Cf. Gigante (1975, 53–61); Nussbaum (1986, 31–74). For the therapeutic model in ancient skepticism, see the Pyrrhonist Sextus and the interesting statement by the Academic Philo in Arius Didymus ap. Stobaeus EcL 2.39.20–41.25, with the discussion of Hahm (1983, 15–37). For the therapeutic model, see also Posidonius' polemic against Chrysippus' doctrine of the emotions as in Kidd (1983, 107–13).

9 On Epicurus' distinction between natural and empty desires: "We should reflect that of desires some are natural, some empty. Of the natural, some are only natural and some are necessary. Of the necessary, some are necessary for happiness, some for comfort of the body, and some for life itself" (Ep. ad Men. 127).

10 The phrase δεινή επιθυμίαis is used by Plato at Rep. 9.573D to describe the desires that torture the tyrant. For another Epicurean use of the phrase, see the ethical treatise (P. Hercul. 346) edited by Capasso, *Trattato etico epicureo* (1982), IX.21ff.

11 Seneca on Anger: "Anger [is] a short madness: for it is equally devoid of self control, regardless of decorum, forgetful of kinship, obstinately engrossed in whatever it begins to do, deaf to reason and advice, excited by trifling causes, awkward at perceiving what is true and just, and very like a falling rock which breaks itself to pieces upon the very thing which it crushes" (retrieved from: www.sophia-project.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/seneca_anger.pdf).

12 Both participants signed a waiver and consent for me to publish their description.

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3

DOES LOVE MATTER FOR JUSTICE?

Introduction

> "Do the gods instill this passion in our minds [...] or does each person interpret his own fierce desire as [the voice of] insane desire?"[1]
>
> *(Virgil, Book IX, vv.252–4)*

How are we compelled to act out of love in a way that feels wrong? We may have lied or cheated, all because of our love for someone. When this happens, are we simply being compelled by an insane desire or is a higher purpose calling to us? The questions that Virgil raises in Book IX of the *Aeneid* encapsulate the themes of this chapter. I will consider the problem of social justice in connection with love, where love is understood as a passion that can help others thrive or as an insane desire that can throw society into chaos.

Love is often seen as a personal matter that does not affect anyone other than those directly involved. But I believe that the actions we take, however small they seem, have the power to influence many lives. We tend to see love as a personal feeling that pertains only to our private sphere and has no influence outside this sphere. However, unhealthy love can affect everyone's well-being. Consider how bad it can be for a teacher to have an unhappy personal life that renders them absent to their students' needs, or for a politician to develop a cynical perspective on life because they are disheartened by their partner's behavior. In this chapter, I will use two stories to illustrate how personal choices in one's love life can affect society and its values.

I will draw on Virgil's two faces of love (*amor pius*, pure love, and *dira cupido*, insane desire) and reflect on how they play out in society when expressed through the bonds of friendship and romantic desire. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil examines the

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contrast between pure love and insane desire to show how loving friendship lay at the foundation of the Roman Empire.

Virgil demonstrates in Book IX of the poem how pure love (*amor pius*), which is generally beneficial to our well-being, can develop into an insane and disruptive passion. This happens in our daily lives as much as it does in epic poetry. Workplace burn-out, slow bureaucracy, unfair treatment, wars, and mental illness can all undermine our pure love and care. They can alter our sense of belonging to the intersubjective societal compound that we care about (Nussbaum 2013). The possibility for enduring love is endangered by the challenges thrown at us by our societal and personal lives. *Amor pius* can easily be overthrown by *dira cupido* if our emotions are not taken seriously and given adequate space for expression.

Love is too often interpreted as a protective force against the outside world. It is not seen as a constructive energy that we should invest in our society, but as a private connection that shields us from external dangers. Laing remarks that the family is taken as an internalized space-time system that has the function of defending individuals from the wider world. So that we can connect with ourselves, we distinguish our inside world from the outside world and use our family dynamics to survive (1990, 12). In this "us against the world" philosophy, love becomes a private source of energy against everything that is felt as foreign. This feeds antisocial behaviors detrimental to common well-being because the love system unites against the world outside.

In this chapter, I will discuss the role that love plays in our ethical choices and thus in our social life. Provided that we enter the polis as ethical actors, this chapter will explain how crucial love is for fairness—how our emotional balance affects the choices we make for ourselves and others, if and how we can achieve justice without love, and if and how love clouds our judgment. I will use the tension between pure love and insane desire as an interpretive key to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy love. When *dira cupido* arises, alternative expressions of *amor pius* such as friendship and care can make space for ethical reasoning about love.

I will relate a tragic story told by Virgil about *amor pius* and *dira cupido*: the tale of Euryalus and Nisus. I will compare Virgil's account with the experience of one of my clients, Moira. These stories will illustrate a social paradox: even if we act in an ethically unjust way, the results of our actions are seen as praiseworthy because they are considered to be expressions of high love. Both Euryalus and Nisus act against their personal interests and social values in the name of love, but the miserable outcome of their actions is praised by society. I will conclude by proposing a resolution to this paradox.

I.1. The Good and the Brave

Euryalus and Nisus are two Trojan warriors. They are seeking refuge from the Greek war by sailing toward Italic shores under the leadership of Aeneas, one of the highest-ranking surviving Trojan warriors (*Aeneid* IX vv.176–449).

Euryalus is a boy of around 13 years old; he is described sometimes as "*puer*" (child) or "*iuvenis*" (kid—9. 181, 217, 276). He is noted for his beauty.[2] His friend Nisus is slightly older and more expert in warfare; he is eager to cut a good figure with Aeneas.[3]

We meet them earlier in the poem: in Book V, Virgil describes a contest held in honor of Anchises, Aeneas' father. Euryalus wins the contest, but only because he cheats—he is helped by Nisus. In Book IX, Nisus comes to his friend's rescue again, but this time with tragic consequences. Against Nisus' advice, Euryalus explores the enemy's quarter at night. (vv.321–2) He finds attractive spoils standing by the tents where Rutulians, the enemy, are "buried in sleep and wine" ("*somno vinoque soluti*," v.189). Stealing the spoils would be a fatal mistake for himself and his people; it would make him a target for the enemy and instigate more violence. But Euryalus cannot resist his instincts. He steals from the spoils and gets caught. Although for Euryalus, "fear confused the path's direction" (v.385), Nisus who also has gone to the enemy's quarters "was clear: and already unaware had escaped the enemy" (v.386).

The moral complexity of the plot is already clear. The knot of love is tight around Nisus' heart. The ethical and political consequences of how he will behave toward Euryalus are significant. Nisus knows that Euryalus has done something wrong—something potentially lethal for them and their army.[4] Euryalus' behavior, dictated by his emotional immaturity, has the potential to trigger a chain of suffering. He cheats, steals, and provokes a war. Can Nisus allow his love for his friend to cloud his judgment, getting in the way of justice and his people's welfare? Giving space to his love for Euryalus would be to give space to injustice.

Euryalus and Nisus are young. They are friends, but now they are on the enemy's field: every decision is fatal. Nisus knows what is going to happen, whereas Euryalus is overwhelmed by fear. "He [Nisus] stopped, and looked back vainly for his missing friend./'Euryalus, unhappy boy, where did I separate from you?/Which way shall I go?'" (v.390). Nisus makes his choice: he runs to save his friend. He is possessed by an insane passion that compels him to act in a way that he would not normally consider right.

Nisus raises the question I quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Perhaps rhetorically, he asks: "Do the gods instill this passion in our minds, Euryalus, or does each person interpret his own fierce desire as [the voice of a God]?"[5]

This is the pivotal question of the book, if not of the entire poem. Nisus' love for Euryalus is a fierce desire that Virgil praises as the voice of a god, but in this moment of hesitation Nisus shows how questionable this love is.

> He [Nisus] saw Euryalus, betrayed by the ground and the night, confused by the sudden tumult, whom the whole troop were dragging away, overpowered, struggling violently in vain. What can he do? With what force, or weapons,

> can he dare to rescue the youth? Should he hurl himself to his death among the swords, and by his wounds hasten to a glorious end?
>
> *(vv.399–403)*

Now the stakes are even higher. Is Nisus ready to die for his friend? Will he be willing to give his young life for someone who acts out of greediness? Is Nisus' love so blind?

He does not even have to think. His personal, ethical, and political choices and instincts are all the same—he must rescue his friend. His insane desire speaks to his ears in the language of a god. Even though he acts out of instinct, what he does is political and ethical: it will be elevated as an example of Roman values. Nisus prays to the moon and the gods: "With these words: […] let me throw their troops into confusion, guide my spear through the air" (vv.409–10). He prays for aid in taking actions that he knows are morally questionable.

He decides to fight for his friend although they have no hope of survival. He finds a way to trick the enemy's army: "truly maddened with fear, Nisus shouted aloud, unable to hide himself in the dark any longer." He takes the blame for what Euryalus has done: "The guilt is all mine, he neither dared nor had the power/the sky and the all-knowing stars be witnesses/he only loved his unfortunate friend too much" (vv.427–30).

"He only loved his friend too much." This is another key sentence for understanding the insane desire behind Nisus' love.[6] When does love become too much? When does love stop us from doing the right thing for ourselves and society? Euryalus is different from Nisus: he is too young for the war and his moral stature is not sufficiently strong for him to be an honorable warrior. The contest in Book V tells us this. Although also very young, Nisus is ready to fight; his moral and physical strength are better trained and tested than his friend's. But "he loves his friend too much," and this love has already swerved his moral compass once before. Nisus sees his friend dying:

> He was still speaking, but the sword, powerfully driven/passed through the ribs and tore the white breast./Euryalus rolled over in death, and the blood flowed/ down his lovely limbs, and his neck, drooping/sank on his shoulder, like a bright flower scythed/by the plough, bowing as it dies, or a poppy weighed/down by a chance shower, bending its weary head.
>
> *(vv.435–8)*

As Nisus witnesses Euryalus' death, he is consumed by the desire for revenge. Sadly, his revenge is also his end. Nisus states in his first speech: "Long has my heart been astir [...] it is not content with peaceful quiet"(v.187)[7]

His mind can only find peace in death. That is the furthest limit of his love. In causing death he finds his own: "Dying, robbed his enemy of life" (v.443). By

killing the enemy, he kills himself; he dies curled peacefully around Euryalus' body. "Then, pierced through, he threw himself on the lifeless body/of his friend, and found peace at last in the calm of death" (v.445). Virgil's words provide a tragic echo of verse 187, bringing together Nisus' beginning and end.

Nisus' love toward his friend is destructive for himself and his army. This private love affects their society negatively. The question raised at the beginning of the chapter thus becomes increasingly pressing as the story unfolds: does love matter for personal good and social justice, or are love and justice two separate truths? I will try to answer these questions as the story proceeds.

The enemies' answer to Euryalus' and Nisus' actions is ruthless. They cut the heads off the young warriors and fix them on spears. The news of Euryalus' death reaches the ears of his mother: "And suddenly all warmth left her helpless bones/ the shuttle was hurled from her hands, the thread unwound" (v.475). She ignores "the soldiers, the danger, the weapons" (v.479) and "fills the heavens with her lament" (v.480).

This moment illuminates the destructiveness that *dira cupido* can spark and the injustice that enters the lives of those around Euryalus. His mother loses her son, and with him she loses her future and present—she loses herself and the time she devoted to him. Nisus loses his integrity, his friend, and his own future. The army loses its peace and its spoils.

Euryalus' mother gazes at her son's head on the spear. That face, so unnatural, is nonetheless enough for her to connect with him and to bid him farewell:

> Is it you I see, Euryalus? You who brought peace/at last to my old age, how could you bring yourself/to leave me alone, cruel child? Why did you not give/your poor mother the chance for a final goodbye/when you were being sent into so much danger?
>
> *(vv.481–4)*

As Euryalus' mother laments, a son should not leave his mother alone. He is the witness to her history. He is the future of what she was in the past. She scolds him because he has abandoned her forever, diverting the laws of nature. But her language is ambiguous. She does not seem to consider him directly responsible for his deeds because "he was sent into danger," but she refers to him as "cruel." The moral voice of Euryalus' mother is as ambiguous as Virgil's voice. She does not even know where her son's body is. She blames him for his poor judgment in going to war, but she blames the others for having made him a war hero: "You lie here in a strange land, given as prey to the carrion/birds and dogs of Latium! I, your mother, did not escort you/in a funeral procession, or close your eyes" (vv.485–8). Despite the pain, blame, and resentment in her words, she acknowledges that all this has happened for a higher purpose: the glory of a nation. Euryalus' death is political, ethical, and personal. The complexity of Virgil's voice finds its best channel in this scene through Euryalus' mother.

I.2. The Glorious and the Right

You might think that this scene is about grief for a child's tragic mistake: a child who compromises not only his life but also those of his friend and compatriots. But instead of acknowledging this childish but tragic mistake, Virgil's ambiguity finds its highest expression in the closing *makarismos* (blessing). Euryalus and Nisus are praised as an example of the Roman army's glory and bravery:

> Happy pair! If my poetry has the power/while the House of Aeneas lives beside the Capitol's/immobile stone, and a Roman leader rules the Empire/ no day will raze you from time's memory.
>
> *(vv. 446–9)*

Virgil openly praises the deeds of these two friends as an example of selfless political courage. Between the lines, however, he lets us wonder how glorious this tale really is. Euryalus' vanity costs his friend's life and his mother's devastation. Nisus' blind love for his friend costs the lives of his compatriots.[8] The boys' emotional immaturity triggers poor ethical choices that have ruthless socio-political repercussions.[9] Yet they are still offered as an example of political glory. Why? How often do we encounter the same paradox in our history textbooks or religious traditions? How often is the passion we praise for inspiring honorable political actions in fact a *dira cupido*—an insane desire that nurtures an immature form of love?

In the secondary literature, this story has been called "a dramatic episode of friendship" (Pease 1935, 6), "the glorification of heroism and friendship" (Cartault 1926, 667), "one of the crowning instances of Virgil's power of appealing to human sensibility" (Conington-H. & Nettleship 1983, 15), and "a separate story of romantic adventure" (Mendell 1951, 216).

Duckworth observes that Virgil has a duty to celebrate military distinction. This story is a way to set the tone for the entire poem (Duckworth 1967). The strength of Euryalus' and Nisus' friendship is supposed to speak on behalf of Augustus' moral and political demeanor, but Virgil quietly weaves several layers inside the story—psychological, ethical, and political.

The events are also presented as a tragedy of free will and arrogance that reflects the stories narrated by Pallas, Lausus, and Turnus.[10], [11] Probably influenced by Eurypides' psychology, Virgil gives his heroes the freedom to fight for their destiny (*fortuna*), but instead they choose to love each other in a self-destructive way. Although the poet seems sympathetic to the positive aspect of Euryalus' and Nisus' bond, he implicitly shows how terrible their behavior is. Their outward appearance meets Augustus' demands: the psychological message is much more complex.

Although the poem emulates the Homeric *Doloneia* (in V–VIII), with an emphasis on Rome and Augustus, Virgil here depicts a psychological and ethical struggle that two young people have to face within their social group. This

psychological study shows two youths whose motives seem noble but in fact stem from a disruptive form of love. This kind of uneducated passion is a recurrent theme in the poem.[12]

Fenik (1960) and Duckworth (1967) remark that Virgil looks to the Homeric *Doloneia* for political reasons but draws the sense of his story from Euripides' *Rhesus*. He is writing a poem modeled on the Greek epic, but what really matters in his writing is inspired by the expressionism of the Hellenistic tradition. His real goal is not to glorify Rome, but to show the risks of unhealthy (yet human) love. A humane politics is a politics made for humans. He movingly depicts this common form of human disquiet and shows the catastrophic impact it can have on our ethical and political lives. Ethics, psychology, and politics are here an indissoluble *unicum*—ignoring any of its components is fatal for these characters. The depth of Virgil's political denunciation is not immediately visible but is certainly remarkable; only in form does he follow Homeric didacticism.

Euripides' *Rhesus* unveils the badness behind epic grandiosity. Euripides, like Virgil, pessimistically expresses the futility of human endeavor, the inadequacy of logical reasoning, and the manipulation of a sadistic deity. In Homeric poems, *kleos* (fame) and *thyme* (honor) are materially oriented. Euripides, conversely, takes a skeptical position on glory. Homer depicts Dolon's mercenary attitude as normal, whereas Euripides judges these aspirations as foolish. They are bearers of *ponos* (toil, labor) and *euklees* (fame). Virgil's position seems to be similar in relation to this story.

Scholars observe that Nisus is primarily motivated by desire for glory and fame.[13] On his part, Euryalus seems greedy.

Because of their youth, they feel more strongly about actions that are undeserving of much attention: Euryalus feels strongly about stealing the enemy's treasures; Nisus feels strongly about protecting his friend. Neither boy knows that they will die for their desires. Virgil seems sympathetic to Euryalus' human flaws. When he describes his death, he depicts its beauty and futility: "As when a richly hued flower is cut down by the plough and withers as it dies, or when the rains beat down the poppy's head, weighed down on a slack neck" (vv.436–8).

Pure love and insane desire are two faces of the same coin: a coin that reveals the strengths and weaknesses of human bonds. Virgil praises Euryalus' and Nisus' value as warriors while implicitly revealing their limits as human beings.

I.3. Moira's Story

The case I will discuss is not as sophisticated as Virgil's epic, but it nonetheless provides an example of love negatively affecting someone's personal and social sense of justice.

In traditional relationships, we may easily be compelled to make choices that invalidate our identity but feel necessary for our heart. We may be caught in dilemmas. Should we accept a morally questionable job that is well-paid and keeps

the family safe, or should we continue in a poorly paid job that lines up with our values but does not pay the bills? Should we give up on personal dreams in favor of our family's stability? It is in the nature of love to force us to choose between our sense of integrity and our love for someone. As with Nisus, who had to choose between his values and his love for his friend, injustice seems to be inevitable. I do not think that love *per se* involves these ultimatums, however. Instead, we only see these situations as emotional either/ors because we have not been sufficiently educated in ethical reasoning concerning love—especially when love has the compelling voice of a *dira cupido*. I believe that if we can make space for ethical reasoning in love, we can find the reasons that reason itself would not know, to paraphrase Pascal. Ethics is the heart of love, just as logic is the brain of reasoning. We must refine our understanding of both if we are to function properly in society.

Moira was a brilliant scientist in her mid-thirties. After her bachelor's degree, she got her PhD at a very prestigious university. However, she had to rush back to her home country in the middle of her PhD program because her boyfriend wanted her with him in their hometown. After a few months, she returned to her university and completed her degree. But Moira's graduation came at a high price. Her partner gave her an ultimatum: she could break up with him and continue her academic career, or she could stay with him and come back home. She chose to return, stay with him, and find a job in her home country. Her decision did not last long: she became increasingly miserable. Her body stopped functioning; she started developing problems with her thyroid. Eventually, Moira decided to look for a more fulfilling job elsewhere.

She met me while she was working abroad for a famous company. She had relinquished her academic aspirations but still hoped to work in research. Again, her partner did not like her absence; Moira felt torn between her career and her relationship. She had no idea what she should do. She knew she wanted a family, but her body was under significant strain. Curiously, considering that Moira's goal was to have a family, she had suffered from amenorrhea for several years. She needed to heal the division in her body and her romantic life. She was pursuing a sense of justice that pertained only to her partner and her idea of a family, not to her body and feelings. Moira gave in and tried to make her partner happy because she craved a family and he felt like home to her. But part of her was acting against her will. Moira felt trapped in her partner's ultimatum.

We first needed to do justice to Moira's body; to soothe its restlessness and give it regular food and rest. She overcame her problems with amenorrhea. The time came to reason ethically about the just thing for her to do for her love life—to think about her love for herself and for her partner. She was not sure if she was in love with him, and he was not sure that he could accept a partner and mother of his future children who did not live in the same town. Their desire to have a family became a *dira cupido*, leading them to make decisions that were not good for their well-being. It is very difficult to stick to *amor pius* when an unhealthy desire pushes

us to fulfill it without sufficient ethical reasoning. My job was to help Moira avoid repeating the patterns she fell into when she was doing her PhD. She felt caught in a claustrophobic net that had no room for choice, but I encouraged her to find space to reason ethically about her love. Moira and her partner loved and cared for each other, but when they acted out of *dira cupido* they were not in contact with that mutual sense of care. Their desire for a future together became a compulsion, and accordingly a source of injustice. Moira inflicted this injustice against herself and her community.

Moira has the potential to make discoveries that would benefit society. She possesses a brilliant mind and a drive to research. An injustice to her nature would impact her and her community. She and her partner could have children whose influence would be important for their immediate society; their unhappiness as a couple may determine their children's positive or negative influence. They are still working on finding a system of justice that works for both of them. But this time, they seem willing to find pragmatic compromises and to make space for reasoning with their hearts.

II.1. The Paradox of *Amor Pius* versus *Dira Cupido*: Friendship

In both stories (Euryalus and Nisus, Moira and her partner) we find a common denominator: the experience of being torn between healthy and unhealthy love, *amor pius* and *dira cupido*, pure love and insane desire. When we feel compelled by insane desire, it is hard to find space for ethical reasoning. The insane desire tells us to act as soon as we can in a self-undermining and unjust direction. In the moment, this action seems necessary to bring us closer to the person we love. But this closeness is fleeting. In both stories, Nisus and Moira act against their sense of justice to be closer to their partner. Despite their good intentions, their decision dramatically increases the distance between themselves, their partners, and the people around them. As a consequence, we might think that *love* is to blame for these injustices, since it is love that confronts us with impossible choices. Despite the lessons that it teaches us about the limits of our human nature, however, I do not think that love itself can ever be unjust. Love challenges us to find a more authentic form of justice. In love, we have the responsibility and the opportunity to reason ethically about justice. In this and the next section I will use the affiliates of love (i.e., friendship and care) as examples of *pius amor*. These affiliates are pivotal for making space for ethical reasoning regarding the insane desire that spoils love's good nature. Friendship and care are two components of love that can help us to find the space *in love* for healthy ethical judgment.

In Moira's story, as much as in Virgil's poem, there is space for a loving compromise that acknowledges the limits and the strengths of both parties. But the fear of loss and the compulsion to be with the other person can be stronger than any ethical reasoning. Nisus could tell Euryalus that cheating is wrong during the contest in Anchises' honor (Book V), instead of helping him to cheat. He could call

his leader when he realizes that Euryalus has deserted the tent, instead of killing people to cover up his mistakes. But in Nisus' claustrophobic compulsion to be closer to Euryalus' world, there is no space for compromise or true ethical choices.

In Moira's and Nisus' stories, their choices are praised as bearers of social value. Society sees in Moira a woman who is loyal to her man and devoted to her family. In Virgil's epic, Augustus praises the two young warriors for their courageous devotion to their country. In the name of love, both characters act against their personal interest and common social values, but the miserable outcome of their actions is praised by society. We have a paradox: even if we act in an ethically unjust way, the results of our actions are praiseworthy. They are considered to express love and devotion. This paradox requires a just resolution.

Virgil eloquently displays the components of the paradox in the *Aeneid*. This epic poem was born as a political project for Augustus; it was realized through Virgil's genius in order to mythologize the origin of Rome, ennoble its history, and celebrate Augustus' family. At the same time, the poem evinces a refined analysis of human emotions that shines a clear light on human flaws. Virgil was ordered by Mecenate to write propaganda that reinforced Augustus' *auctoritas* (political power) and proclaimed Roman values, but he decided to write about love in all its complex forms. His vast cultural knowledge allowed him to knit together Homer and Homeric scholia with Greek tragedy and lyrics in a way that was digestible for the Roman audience and obedient to Augustus' demands, but at the same time loyal to his own understanding of human life.

In Book IX, according to Augustus' demands, Virgil celebrates the value of a pure and chaste friendship that is foreign to homosexual desire and focused on the ideals of the late Republic and early Principate of Rome. But he does not place this honorable story on the battlefield; he places it within the context of a juvenile mistake. By doing so, Virgil emphasizes the vanity of human endeavors and the *dira cupido* that drives them.

Euryalus and Nisus' friendship is an oxymoron that binds together honor and greediness, political loyalty and personal vanity, and ambition and blind love. This might explain why Virgil uses the noun *amicus* (friend) only 16 times in the poem.[14] Of these occasions, only one refers to Euryalus and Nisus' relationship—and this on the occasion of their death. Their friendship is less strong than the passion that magnetically attracts Nisus to Euryalus.

The story of these Trojan friends was officially written to applaud the Roman value of friendship. This friendship was not intended to be homosexual love; instead, it concerns competing obligations toward themselves and the social group to which they belong. Augustus' Rome, the Rome of the Principate, was meant to be an empire based on the value of friendship: that is, a "*phyletic*" (loving) societal glue. The value of friendship is the reason why Euryalus and Nisus' deaths are followed by the *makarismos* (blessings, 9.446–5).

Cicero's letters with Matius, and their engagement with the question of responsibilities to *patria* (homeland) and *amicitia* (friendship), "provides a glimpse of what

must have been an intense and widespread reconsideration of the meaning of friendship in a time of political upheaval and realignment of personal loyalties" (Fam. 11.27–28). For the Romans, friendship was a way to express loyalty and political sympathies. The assassination of Julius Caesar, Osgood observes, is paradigmatic of the personal and political cost of a lack of loyal friendship (2008, 98–101). Those who conspired against Caesar were former friends who became his worst enemies. Similarly, Euryalus and Nisus are not truly good friends: the lack of this bond costs them their lives. They are lovers caught in an unbalanced and unhealthy relationship, but Virgil depicts them as Augustus wants to see them—two friends fighting for the honor of Rome.

Ennius' *Annals* are another important source for the *Aeneid*. As Skutsch (1985) remarks, Ennius' description of the relationship between Cn. Servilius Geminus and his companion are a crucial starting point for Virgil's story. Ennius identifies the distinctive components of the bond between the two men as vital for their military success. Like Virgil, Ennius places the story not on the field of the Cannae battle but in its background. This further parallels Book IX of the *Aeneid*.[15]

Modeled on the *Annals*, Virgil's two Trojan warriors metaphorically represent the victims who died for Rome's foundation and served its honor. Through the "most emphatic authorial intervention in the epic" (9.446–9), Virgil's concluding *makarismos* (blessing) stresses that friendship will live as a political value in Roman memory (Hardie 1994, 446–9).

Virgil calls Euryalus and Nisus "*fortunati*" (blessed), but uses an ambiguous word that implies a positive and a negative meaning. "*Fortuna*" means Destiny. From Augustus' point of view, Euryalus' and Nisus' lives will be the bedrock of the *domus Aeneae*; their friendship will serve as an everlasting example of Rome's political honor. From Virgil's point of view, however, their destiny is a questionable *kleos* (glory) that reminds us of "having loved too much" (Book IX, v.430) with a *dira cupido*. If Nisus had let himself see Euryalus as his younger friend, he would have seen the human limits that cost both their lives. In the bond of their friendship, he could have found the real sources to love Euryalus as a human being and show him the value of integrity and honesty. Instead, he is moved by a compulsion to be close to Euryalus without properly considering his own ethical values.

II.2. Philosophy of Friendship

According to Sablé, friendship is the only variant of love that helps us find a locus to reason about a virtuous form of love. Freed from passion, the mature experience of friendship permits us to appreciate the moral virtues of our partner as disclosed in the transparency of mutual love. "Friendship is a species of virtue which can only be founded upon the esteem of the person loved, that is, upon qualities of the soul, such as fidelity, generosity and discretion, and on good qualities of mind" (*Of Friendship*, Sablé, 1870). This disclosure of the other person's moral constitution through the experience of friendship requires equality between the

partners—equality that was missing in the stories I relayed. In Moira's case, I helped her and her partner to acknowledge and reinforce the friendship in their love. In that sense of friendship, Moira could understand her partner's limits; she was able to reach a compromise between her talents and her love for him. Sablé continues: "It is also necessary that friendship be reciprocal, because in friendship one cannot, as in romantic love, love without being loved" (*On Friendship*). Whereas romantic love can veil the motivations of the moral agent due to passion, the sober, egalitarian relation of friendship permits a veridical disclosure of moral character through mutual respect. From this perspective, Euryalus and Nisus are not friends. Nisus is passionately and blindly attracted to Euryalus: he is thus incapable of seeing Euryalus' moral constitution or making wise choices concerning him.

Sablé's praise of the virtue in friendship contrasts sharply with La Rochefoucauld's critique. In his maxims, La Rochefoucauld condemns friendship as a form of transactional and vicious self-centeredness. "What humanity has named friendship is only a business, a reciprocal arrangement of interests, only an exchange of services. At bottom, it is only a type of commerce where self-love is always designing to win something" (Maxim 83, in Sablé, 1870). For La Rochefoucauld, friendship can be elevated to a political feeling but it is nevertheless condemned to remain in that space of ambiguity that Virgil describes. Friendship, La Rochefoucauld insists, is a form of polite egotism disguised as a virtue; it permeates the public and the private spheres of human interaction. For Sablé, on the other hand, we can speak about ethical reasoning in love *only* when we talk about the caring bond that characterizes friendship. It is only in egalitarian friendship that virtue can manifest transparently, not in the passion of romance or the hierarchy of marriage.

In *The Human Condition* (1953), Hannah Arendt calls this form of egalitarian friendship "*amor mundi*": love of the world as it is. Love is a basic bond that keeps humans together despite their flaws and limits. Arendt also criticizes love's unworldly and anti-political essence as it supposedly, "for the reason of its passion, destroys in-between which relates us to and separates us" (1953, 242). According to Arendt, the intimate essence of love unites only at the expense of those who remain outside the bond. In Euryalus' and Nisus' story, their *dira cupido* represents precisely this separating power. Nisus' love brings him close to his lover, but this closeness undermines his own safety and the safety of his army.

Although Arendt recognizes the connection between love and the political sphere, she vigorously argues against love's anti-political character. She writes of the need to replace this force with a new, public, and artificial *vinculum* or bond—*amor mundi*. Despite Arendt's attempts to keep love away from ethics and politics, she refers to *amor mundi* as a potential form of positive love, expressed through friendship, that could keep human connections tight and alive in the polis. As Euryalus' and Nisus' story shows, their friendship is not inclusive; it is exclusive and destructive. Whereas MacIntyre (1984), Dworkin (1977), and Eshete (1981) consider the principle of fraternity to be ethical and political, Arendt is hesitant to acknowledge its social purity. For example, MacIntyre writes: "The Aristotelian

virtue of friendship and the Christian love of the neighbor both contributed in the eighteenth century to the newly-named virtue of fraternity" (1984, 237). In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls proposes the coupling of fraternity and justice; he criticizes the lack of attention hitherto paid to fraternity because of its association with sentiment. Dworkin (1977) speaks of "integrity" as a political virtue and "fraternal association" as contributing to society's well-being and mutual care.

Arendt, like Virgil, warns us about the risk of idealizing fraternal love in politics, especially when it is decoupled from educated feelings. According to her, *amor mundi* is a form of *amor pius*, a pure and compassionate form of love that loves the world for what it is. This love is different from the "warmth and fraternity of closely packed human beings" (Arendt 1953, 77) in absolute worldlessness and unreality, unrelated to others.

Arendt attacks Rousseau, who "introduced compassion into political theory," and Robespierre, who "brought it to the market-place with the vehemence of his great revolutionary" spirit (1984, 92–6). Fraternal, gregarious love is easy to manipulate for the worst purposes; the resultant intimacy becomes a weapon that destroys what is left outside.[16]

Arendt, MacIntyre, and C. S. Lewis are united by the Aristotelian premise that friendship constitutes a condition for political activity. Thus reinterpreted, friendship for Arendt is due to and concerns the way in which friends hold one another without emotional surprises. The amical bond renders the unspeakable surprises of the world human and acceptable:

> For the Greeks the essence of friendship consisted in discourse held that only the constant interchange of talk united citizens. In discourse the political importance of friendship, and peculiar to it, were made manifest. This converse (in contrast intimate talk in which the individuals speak about themselves), permeated though it may be by pleasure in the friend's concern with the common world, which remains "inhuman" in a very literal sense unless it is constantly talked about by human beings.... We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.
>
> *(Arendt 1968, 24–5)*

For Arendt and Sandel, the notion of friendship embodies a politics of world-building that can be "humanized" by speaking of it. The world-building to which Arendt refers is not a static end; it is a complex enigma that we have a duty to question and solve. The loving bond of friendship creates a space of love that gives us the room to reflect ethically on the best solution for ourselves and our community. It generates a possibility that was not there before. For this reason, love cannot be political on Arendt's account: if it was, it would not give us sufficient space to be who we are. In Arendt's response to Scholem's charge that she is "heartless" toward the Jewish people (*Herzenstakt*), she explains the un-politicalness of love as follows:

> I am not moved by any "love" of this sort, and for two reasons: I have never in my life "loved" any people or collective group, neither the German people, the French, the Americans, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love only my friends, and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons. Moreover, this "love of the Jews" would appear to me, since I am myself Jewish, as something rather suspect... Generally speaking, the role of the "heart" in politics seems to me altogether questionable.
>
> *(Arendt 1978a, 246–7)*

The generality and pervasiveness of politics does not leave enough space for the ethical reasoning about love for *this* person in *that* situation. Augustine's idea of love, which Arendt addresses in her dissertation, is "the supreme binding force" that should unconditionally lead to I will that you be (*volo ut sis*) (Arendt 1978b, 144). This notion of love would not be possible if love was an abstract political value. For Arendt, *amor mundi* is a form of love that allows us to see the actual qualities of individuals. It does not lose them in abstract political values. *Amor mundi* is thus an antidote to the paradox I outlined above that praises personal injustices in the name of political love (the Holocaust is a sad example of this). The amical bond of friendship as *amor mundi* represents the perfect form of *amor pius*. We can achieve this love if we commit to self-reflection and accepting the people in front of us for who they are. Although I still believe that love ultimately affects politics on a more general level, it is in this concreteness that we find its healthy roots and avoid painful paradoxes. Arendt is correct in saying that "the role of the 'heart' in politics seems questionable." But whereas she interprets this "questionability" as a door that needs to remain shut for everyone's good, I believe that we need to open the door. We need to learn what is behind it so we can avoid selfish behaviors.

Whether we are aware of it or not, love matters in politics. Against our will, we might be among those left out of Euryalus' and Nisus' circle of love. Or we might be among those who act in our own private world while putting others at risk. Uneducated love is likely to produce selfish actions because it is inherently inclined to exclude the outside world. It would be a relief to think that love's complexity is foreign to ethics and politics, but the fact is that we are humans. We have bodies; love is the blessing and the curse of our being bodies interacting with a live-world. Nozick writes, half-jokingly, that "philosophy was born as love for wisdom, but in fact what they love is reasoning" (2008, 225). The importance of feelings to ethical discourse has been repeatedly denied, even though emotions are foundational to the ethics of care (Laugier & Paperman 2005; Tronto 1995). But if we do not question the complexity of our love, sooner or later our life might be driven by a destructive *dira cupido*.

II.3. *Amor Pius* versus *Dira Cupido*: Care

When friendship is impossible because the Aristotelian condition of equality and mutual esteem is not present, care is the other way in which love can be ethically considered. When an insane desire demands that we make choices in our love life that are out of line with our sense of justice, care is a fruitful way to express our love ethically.

Care (*Sorge*) is the fundamental basis of being-in-the-world (*Dasein*) according to Heidegger (1962, 56).[17] On Sheehan's reading of Heidegger (2015), the unity of our factual existence as human beings is expressed by care, which opens up the world as possibility. Everyday concerns blind us and oblige us to see life within their limits; care allows new possibilities to be revealed. Beings' interrelationships are not mechanical, blind, or empty; they are filled with the possibilities offered by care (Capobianco 2010). Foreign to any personal purpose or religious creeds, care is the most fundamental loving feeling. It defines human nature. It allows human beings to honor their loving bond without falling prey of a *dira cupido*. Caring is an interactive process that reveals itself in the relationship with the other, especially in moments of vulnerability. Caring would have helped Nisus to see Euryalus' true vulnerability; it would have helped Moira to see her own vulnerability in relation to her partner. These realizations would have made the space for concerns, leading to new possibilities for handling the situation. Care, like friendship, can help us escape the constraints of an unhealthy love through ethical practice.

II.3.1. Care as a Political Emotion

In *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters For Justice* (2013), Nussbaum reflects on the delicate intersection of love and politics. She considers Kant's remark on "radical evil." According to Kant, radical evil is not the product of social conditions; it is deeply rooted in the universality of human nature. We are always "interrelated" to other beings, and often this interrelation occurs in ways that are not caring. Kant concludes that individuals have an "ethical duty" to join groups, movements, or organizations that strengthen their intentionality to treat other people with care. The role of individuals and their governments is to ensure the "interrelationship of all beings," and to allow the "suffusion of care" in all interrelationships.[18] Our need to belong is not merely a psychological need. It is also an ethical demand that governments should fulfill.

Interrelationships must be chosen and maintained according to a categorical external claim. "Here lies the challenge that [Nussbaum's book] takes up: how can a decent society do more for stability and motivation without becoming illiberal […]?" (2013, 6). Nussbaum answers this question as follows: "political principles should not be built upon any comprehensive doctrine of the meaning and purpose of life, religious or secular, and in which the idea of equal respect for persons gives rise to a careful abstemiousness about government endorsement of any

particular religious or comprehensive ethical view" (2013, 6). Political principles should be built on care and the emotional expression to which they are concretely connected.

According to Nussbaum, emotions contain appraisals "that have evaluative content." These appraisals are not based on any pre-constituted doctrine; they are instead rooted in lived experience.

> We might say that a liberal state asks citizens who have different overall conceptions of the meaning and purpose of life to overlap and agree in a shared political space, the space of fundamental principles and constitutional ideals. But then, if those principles are to be efficacious, the state must also encourage love and devotion to those ideals.
>
> *(Nussbaum 2013, 7)*

Care should not be an abstract principle, but a political space that we carve out based on our lived experience to guarantee basic human functioning. Love in the form of care and caring interrelation should be a serious social principle, and we ought to be educated accordingly. In Nussbaum's study of cognitive and animal behavior psychology, care existentially precedes well-being among humans, animals, and possibly even plants:

> all the major emotions are "eudemonistic," meaning that they appraise the world from the person's own viewpoint and the viewpoint, therefore, of that person's evolving conception of a worthwhile life … If distant people and abstract principles are to get a grip on our emotions, therefore, these emotions must somehow position them within our circle of concern [people with intrinsic value who stir deep emotions and are connected to our imagining of a valuable life], creating a sense of "our" life in which these people and events matter as parts of our "us," our own flourishing.
>
> *(Nussbaum 2013, 11)*

Nussbaum continues by arguing that poetry and symbols are crucial as human expressions of this care (2013, 16–17). She does not propose that we ground society on abstract principles. Instead, she wants us to ground society on the principles' corresponding emotions and their contents in the substance of social and political interrelationships and actions. Care shows up in the way that we build our cities and maintain our rural ethos. Parks are open spaces for mutuality; monuments show us how to care for memory; architecture enables human encounters and privacy.

Care is a form of *amor pius*: a healthy way to express love in our personal and social lives. As we saw in Euryalus and Nisus' story and in Moira's story, our sense of right and wrong is strongly influenced by our emotional maturity. Caring is one way that we can develop emotional maturity: it allows us to come

into contact with our own and others' vulnerability. When we care, we see a person and their vulnerabilities for who and what they are. The concerns we nurture for this vulnerability reveal new possibilities for existence—possibilities that would otherwise disappear under the pressure of unhealthy love. Education in caring is of paramount importance for social and personal justice, especially when we make choices in our love life. We are caught against our will in a web of influences that rely on both rational choices and fervent desires. The complexity of love may not *need* to play any role in our political choices, but as a matter of fact love *does* influence our collective well-being—because we are human beings. As humans, we experience emotions. We are interconnected; our psychological balance and our emotional maturity sets the tone for our social actions. A government that does not encourage emotional education in love does not act in its citizens' interests—consider for instance the rapid spread of emotional problems like depression and anxiety (WHO action plan 2013–2020).[19] Encouraging a way of thinking that emphasizes the interconnection between human beings and stresses the importance of ethical reflections regarding our emotional choices can help to reduce these emotional disorders. Such disorders are rooted in existential loneliness. I therefore hold that education in love is essential for achieving social justice and political stability. Ethics cannot be separated from emotional education; such education should be provided at school, as early as elementary level. We can educate ourselves in the boundaries of healthy and unhealthy love. It is possible to "love too much" (Book IX, v.430) when we act out of a blind passion without sufficient education or awareness of what we are doing. As in the examples above, we might end up betraying our talents or our fellow humans—and doing so out of love. Love is "too much" when we are not sufficiently educated about it. It is not love that pollutes our rational thinking, but the lack of space for educating ourselves in rational thought.[20]

Unfortunately, a disparaging attitude toward the study of emotions and ethics developed throughout the history of philosophy.[21] Schopenhauer and Kant both considered love to be foreign to ethics. Love was seen instead as a pathological and intrusive feeling that would lead humanity into a slow degradation in the form of sexual pleasure.[22] To counterbalance this tendency, Nussbaum's book promotes appropriate emotional support for a humane and decent political culture. She is not the first to do so. John Stuart Mill envisioned education in a "religion of humanity." Rabindranath Tagore proposed a "religion of man," and Auguste Comte a "religion of humanity" that would include public rituals and emotion-laden symbols. John Rawls described emotions as supporting and endorsing "basic ideas of justice." If a society is stable for the right reasons (justice, equality, tolerance, etc.) then its basic principles must be enthusiastically embraced. Among these principles, care is an important constitutive principle of justice. It stresses the relatedness of living beings with each other. Care is a palpable feeling: an ever-present form of reaction. Care implies love and justice, although it is still wrapped in a mystery.

Agamben defines "mystery" as a form of overwhelming commitment. According to Solomon, trying to understand love can certainly be overwhelming—but "overwhelming" is also how Nietzsche describes the good life. This good life instigates a feeling of power overcoming old resistances (cited in Solomon 2008, 14). Overcoming our resistance toward the pervasiveness of an insane desire and finding our way toward care benefits our society. We feel, therefore we are. We know that we are in the world because of the presence of something belonging to the world. This presence speaks to us about our surroundings. For Solomon, our body is an immediate obligation toward our emotions; our ability to act is a demand for ethical reflection. Separating the inner and outer dimensions of the body, separating psychology from ethics, emotions from the good, and sanity from fairness implies a defective ability to reason about the possibilities of love as a societal good. The immediate evidence of our bodily wholeness in this life-world is an ethical demand for a thorough consideration of love in the different areas of our life. As Solomon shows, emotions are precise felt-movements that oblige me to react bodily to the life-world and connect me with it. This is a political approach to love: my bodily and personal presence are necessarily connected to the web of my polis. The approach requires an ethical commitment to understanding the inner movements of our emotions and finding the right words to describe them.

Emotions are sometimes seen as a bias, rather than as a means for justice.[23] However, I believe that logic stands to reason as ethics stands to love—we need to educate our minds and hearts in love if we want to foster a fair society. Consider the stories I told in this chapter. If care and friendship had been ethically considered above the compelling strength of the *dira cupido*, the final outcomes would have been different: Euryalus and Nisus would have been true exempla; Moira and her partner would have been able to avoid the suffering of betrayal and loneliness. Love is a complex feeling. But I believe that care and friendship are two ways to access its ethical component and attain justice.

Conclusion

Let us return to our initial questions concerning the right balance between justice and love. The original question concerned whether love matters for personal good and social justice, or whether we should make important choices independently of our emotions. I used the tension between *amor pius* and *insana cupido* as an interpretive key to unlock an answer to these questions. *Amor pius* (pure love) and *dira cupido* (insane desire) are the two faces of love, which each reveal human strengths and weaknesses. In this chapter, I used the story from the *Aeneid* and the story of my client as examples of how choices in our love lives can affect ourselves and our society. A social paradox emerged through these stories: the injustices committed in the name of love are often praised as possessing high social value. This happens because we have not been sufficiently trained in ethics for love. We are therefore

uneducated in how to handle the compulsions of love, although we are educated in reason in order to handle the contradictions of our minds. In the last part of the chapter, I proposed friendship and care as exemplary variants of love. Friendship and care can open a space to ethically discuss human bonds and vulnerability in love.

Ethical Takeaway

1. Be friends with the person whom you love or feel attracted to.
2. See the vulnerability in yourself and in the person you love; find new possibilities for handling that vulnerability with care.
3. Consider the personal and social consequences of your acts of love.

Exercises

These exercises are intended to train us to distinguish between *dira cupido* and *amor pius*, and to reason in an ethical way about problems in love.

a. Imagine your situation as if you were a character in a movie. You see yourself as one of the many characters in this movie. How would the movie go? How would your character act? What would be the consequences of those actions? Can you see all the people involved in the movie? Would you recommend that the characters make different decisions? If it helps, you can enact the movie with dolls or a visual board.
b. When compelled to act in a way that does not feel right, but where there do not seem to be other ways to act, do not commit. Try to see the person in your romantic dilemma as one of your best friends. Take the time to imagine them as this friend. What would you tell them? What would you do for them? What are their limits, and how do those limits interfere with yours? Would you act otherwise? If so, how? Write down the answers to these questions and meditate on them throughout the day.
c. When you feel uncomfortable in your romance because what you are doing does not align with your sense of justice, reflect on the vulnerability behind the action you are taking. For instance, you want to lie to your parents to cover up your girlfriend's religion. Ask yourself what weakness you are trying to cover with that lie. Probably you are afraid that your parents will not welcome something new, and you want to be loved by them. Instead of implicating yourself and your girlfriend in a lie, find a caring way to heal that vulnerability. For instance, you may seek to understand all the ways in which your parents can love you or provide yourself the love you need.

The analysis that this exercise requires is difficult, so you can do it post-hoc. If you have already done something out of love that felt wrong, you can go back

to that memory. See how you could have acted otherwise by healing the vulnerable wound.

Notes

1 "*Dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt, Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido*?" Virgil, Aeneid, cf. 184. From now on, I will use Tony Kline's translation, which can be retrieved at: http://pages.pomona.edu/~cmc24747/sources/vergil/aen_11.htm.

2 "*Quo pulchrior alter non fuit Aeneadum Troiana neque induit arma*," which translates as "and no one who served Aeneas or carried Trojan weapons was more handsome" (9. 179–80).

3 Nisus states in his first speech to Euryalus that he wants to achieve glory by killing the enemy in battle; cf. 186 f.: "*aut pugnam aut aliquid iamdudum invadere magnum mens agitat mihi*."

4 21 Cf. 165 (*indulgent vino*), 316 f. (*somno vinoque . . . corpora fusa*), 336 f. (*multoque . . . deo victus*; as the adjective implies, the *deus* is Bacchus rather than Somnus), 346 (*magnum . . . cratera*), 349 f. (*cum sanguine mixta vina*). Cf. Cartault, p.698, n.3 (to p.672): "*le motif de l'ivresse, si largement développe par Virgile n'existe pas dans la Dolonie*."

5 See: "*dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt, Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido*?" cf. 184f.

6 It is worth noting that Nisus twice accuses his friend of excess (*nimia* (354), *nimium* (430)).

7 See: "*mens agitat mihi, nec placida contenta quiete est*," v.187.

8 Otis (1962, 315): Nisus and Euryalus "succumb to the lust of plunder" (393); they "pay the penalty for their own excesses." Otis is here speaking not only of Nisus and Euryalus, but also of Mezentius, Camilla, and Turnus.

9 It is Nisus who, realizing at last that there has been too much slaughter, stops Euryalus from attacking Messapus' companions; cf. 353–6: "*breviter cum talia Nisus* (*sensit enim nimia caede atque cupidine ferri*) '*absistamus*' *ait*, '*nam lux inimica propinquat. poenarum exhaustum satis est, via facta per hos*.'"

10 Otis suggests that "the devotion of Nisus and his tragic grief is a forecast of the affection and grief of Aeneas for Pallas in Book 10" (1962, 350).

11 Turnus, led by his "*furor ... caedisque insana cupido*" fails to open the gate (IX, 756–61), insolently despoils the slain Pallas of his swordbelt (X, 495–505), welcomes the breaking of the truce in XII, and as a result of his reluctance to face Aeneas is responsible for Amata's death (XII, 595–603; cf. XII, 61–3).

12 Wounded by Aeneas, he appeals for mercy; cf. XII, 932–6: "*miseri te si qua parentis tangere cura potest, oro* (*fuit et tibi talis Anchises genitor*) *Dauni miserere senectae et me, seu corpus spoliatum lumine mavis, redde meis*." The father-son relationship makes an effective plea, and Aeneas is about to spare him when he sees the sword belt and is reminded of Turnus' arrogant treatment of Pallas in X. Turnus is characterized throughout by *furor*, *violentia*, and *ira*. His *dira cupido* and reckless desire for booty combine to destroy him, as they do Nisus and Euryalus in IX.

13 See Virgil: "*aut pugnam aut aliquidiam—durum invadere magnum/mens agitat mihi*" (vv.185–6).

14 The word occurs in vv.1.486, 1.610, 2.93, 3.82, 5.337, 5.350, 5.452, 5.719, 5.869, 6.507, 6.509, 6.149, 9.198, 9.389, 9.430, and 9.444.

15 The episode of Nisus and Euryalus is sometimes thought to be modeled on this momentous event in Roman history. The attempts of two Trojans to break through the Latin siege and get information to Aeneas parallels an episode related by Ennius

from the battle of Cannae, in which P. Sempronius Tuditanus encourages—out of sheer ambition—his fellow soldiers to rejoin those Romans from whom they have been cut off by fighting through the surrounding Carthaginians. As in Virgil's narrative, Servilius dies. The death of at least one member of the relationship is thus a component of Ennius' episode of friendship.

16 Love, as distinct from friendship, is extinguished at the very moment it is displayed in public. ("Never seek to tell thy love/Love that never told can be.") Because of its inherent worldlessness, love can only become false and perverted when it is used for political purposes such as the change or salvation of the world (Arendt 1953, 51–2).

17 See, for example: "Dasein's facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in. The multiplicity of these is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining" (Heidegger 1962, 56); "If we have regard for what we have worked out under the title of 'temporality' as the meaning of the Being of care, we find that while the ordinary interpretation of Dasein, within its own limits, has its justification and is sufficient, we cannot carry through a genuine ontological analysis of the way Dasein stretches along between birth and death… Dasein does not fill up a track or stretch 'of life'—one which is somehow present-at-hand—with the phases of its momentary actualities. It stretches itself along in such a way that its own Being is constituted in advance as a stretching-along. The 'between' which relates to birth and death already lies in the Being of Dasein … It is by no means the case that Dasein 'is' actual in appoint of time, and that, apart from this, it is 'surrounded' by the non-actuality of its birth and death. Understood existentially, birth is not and never is something past in the sense of something no longer present-at-hand; and death is just as far from having the kind of Being of something still outstanding, not yet present-at-hand but coming along…As long as Dasein factically exists, both the 'ends' and their 'between' are, and they are in the only way which is possible on the basis of Dasein's Being as care. Thrownness and that Being towards death in which one either flees it or anticipates it, forms a unity; and in this unity birth and death are 'connected' in a manner characteristic of Dasein. As care, Dasein is the 'between'" (Heidegger 1962, 426–7).

18 Since its birth with Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982), the ethics of care has given an important role to the emotions, starting from the critique of the liberal paradigm of justice. Female care theorists such as Tronto (1995), Noddings (1984), Held (2006), and Kittay (1999) have dedicated numerous works on the topic.

19 Retrieved from: www.who.int/initiatives/mental-health-action-plan-2013-2030.

20 The development of academic research into emotions, for instance, is concerning. Such research retains a disparaging attitude toward emotions, and questionably combines technology and ethics in order to "persuade" users' ethical choices in the market, the web, and politics. I am thinking here of persuasive technologies denounced by the Center for Human Technology (see for example: www.humanetech.com/what-we-do).

21 The prejudices against emotions have been numerous and mostly nurtured by modern Western culture. Descartes remarked that emotions represented merely the agitation of the animal spirits in the pineal gland, Spinoza called them a confused idea due to fluctuations in the vital stream, and Herbart regarded them as the discarded waste in the building-up of the mind. In Chapter 2 of *Human Emotions and the Origin of Bioethics*, I write more extensively on emotions in the history of philosophy.

22 Kant on love: "Love out of inclination cannot be commanded; but kindness done from duty—although no inclination impels us, and even although natural and unconquerable disinclination stands in our way—is Practical, and not Pathological love, residing in the will and not of melting compassion" (*Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*). "Because sexuality is not an inclination which one human being has for another as such, but is an inclination for the sex of another, it is a principle of the degradation of human nature" (Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 164). Schopenhauer on love: "Love does not hesitate to intrude with its trash […] Why all this noise and fuss? ... Why should such a trifle play so important role?" (*World as Will and Idea*, 25)

23 See, for example, the presidential address to the American Philosophical Association in which Joel Feinberg asked "What relevance, if any, do appeals to sentiment have for issues in practical ethics? The abrupt way to respond with the question is to respond 'none'; sentiment is one thing and argument is another, and nothing fogs the mind as thoroughly as emotion" (Feinberg 2013, 19).

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4

DOES TRAGEDY MATTER FOR LOVE?

Introduction

Do we need tragedy in our love life? Does tragedy influence our capacity to love ourselves and others, or does it just scar us? Is it a sense of tragedy or the lack of it that separates us from each other?

I do not intend to encourage a pessimistic worldview whereby happiness can be only achieved if its opposite also exists. I am going to defend the claim that lacking a tragic sense of life leads to a pessimistic, rigid, and consequentialist worldview. On this worldview, things are owed to us if we behave in a certain way. Such a worldview might induce a deep loneliness in which it is illogical to accept ourselves, make sense of our lives, or love ourselves and others. I agree with Nietzsche's implication that losing a sense of tragedy entails blaming victims for their experiences (1967; Price 1998). If all your life experiences logically follow from your actions, anything bad that happens to you must be your fault. As Solomon remarks, "the denial of tragedy begins in a seemingly innocent philosophical thesis: whatever happens, happens for a reason" (2010, 29). If you are going through something tragic, you are to blame. If your child falls ill, it is because you did not take care of them. If you lose your home, it is because you made poor choices. If you lose your job, it is because you were insufficiently committed to it. In this "innocent philosophical thesis," there is no space for the unpredictability of life. By losing a sense of tragedy, we replace compassion, love, and care with blame, shame, and contempt. This thesis is grounded on the illusion that if we stick to societal or religious rules, then happiness and wealth will follow. If that does not happen, we must have made a shameful mistake on the way.

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I believe the absence of a sense of tragedy generates what is truly tragic. This absence reinforces our blindness toward other people's lives and commits us to a deep-rooted loneliness like that experienced by Antigone and her uncle Creon.

In this chapter, I will defend the claim that making space for the tragic sense of life can bring about a meaningful worldview: knowing that the unexpected can happen brings us nearer to ourselves. It compels us to question what we are doing and the meaning of things that happen. The sense of tragedy remedies the delusional sense of entitlement that so many of us share.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will analyze the word "tragedy." In the second part, I will use a client's experience to shed light on what it means to lose the sense of tragedy in our love life. In the third part, I will address Antigone's and Creon's tragedy.

I. The Meaning of Tragedy

In literature, tragedy is a powerful instrument that teaches us how to be humble and kind toward each other. In his *Poetics* Aristotle describes tragedy as connected to *hamartia* (a fatal mistake) and *katharsis* (purification). The tragic hero is a normal person whose tragic flaw compels them to commit a fatal mistake.[1] This mistake reverses their situation: they fall from peak happiness into misery. The tragic mistake is often linked to the hero's *hubris* (arrogance): they believe that they have full control over their life. They may even believe that they can compete with the gods. *Hubris* blinds us toward our flaws and other people's lives, leading us to commit a fatal mistake. In everyday life, we may take the example of someone who insists on marrying their partner while being completely blind to their incompatibilities; the marriage will make both partners unhappy.

On Aristotle's account, the tragic chain of actions that leads to the fall are not contingent, but logical and inevitable. But the positive side of tragedy is its thematic significance. After suffering, the hero understands their mistakes, gains greater self-awareness, and feels more compassionate toward their own self and others.

Literature teaches us that we need tragedy to become better people, to be more aware of our flaws, and to temper the delusion of having control over our lives. Tragedy allows us to achieve a greater awareness of our existence. Missing out on tragedy would be detrimental for our capacity to love and to choose what is best. According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, "tragedy is the imitation of an action with incidents arousing pity and fear" whose end goal is "to accomplish catharsis of such emotion" (Lock & Arms 1962). At the end of the tragic play, the audience feels *katharsis*—purification. They are purged of their pity and fear because they have suffered with the tragic hero. The audience now possesses deeper moral awareness and keener self-knowledge.

I.1. The Etymology of Tragedy

The origin of the word "tragedy" is unclear, but even its uncertain origin tells us something. The word appears to stem from the combination of two Greek terms: *tragos* and *oide*. *Tragos* means "goat"; *oide* means "song."

Some scholars use Aristotle's *Poetics* to argue that the actors in tragic performances wore goat-faced masks (*Poetics* IV, 1449a 10–15). Other scholars follow the ancient Greek mathematician Eratosthenes: he believed that tragedy was a song *for* the goat in the sense that the actors were singing for the prize of a goat. In both cases, the goat remains mysterious—why should a goat give birth to "tragedy"?

A long list of brilliant minds have tried to shed light on this quadruped. Aristotle was the first, followed by Vico, Nietzsche, Pickard-Cambridge, Ridgway, Murray, and Thompson. They all agree that the goat is a god, and the most orgiastic of all the gods—Dionysus. Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* ([1872] 1967) argues that tragedy was born from the satiric spirit of Dionysus (the Greek god of ecstasy) struggling against Apollo (a symbol of measured restraint). Order versus disorder, beauty versus instinct, and rationality versus irrationality are the opposing forces that bring tragedy into being.

Greek theatres would often contain a shrine dedicated to Dionysus. During tragic performances, the priest devoted to this god was given the best seat. He would watch a show full of irrationality, compulsions, and personal dramas.

Ridgway believes that these kinds of orgiastic celebrations are still performed among some tribal societies today. I think that all of us, every day, live the tension between rational and irrational, instinct and reason, duty and pleasure. The sense of tragedy lies in this tension. Tragedy is the human being taking center stage, in all of its disharmonies and contradictions. Superb tragedies like Euripides' *Medea* or Sophocles' *Antigone* can express the full complexity of the human soul due to their exploration of these tensions. The tragedies speak to us—to our contrasts and our limits—from a primordial perspective. In this sense, there is pleasure in tragedy (Feagin, 1983).

Some philologists attribute the origin of "tragedy" to other sources. There are those who believe the word originates in the Hittite *tarhh* ("strong") and *òd* ("song"): "song of the powerful." The word would thus characterize the hero's devotion to their god. Others think that "tragedy" stems from the hilliric *trg* ("market") and *òd* ("song"): "song of the market." On this interpretation, tragedy conveys the contrast between the urban and country market: two different ways to represent people's lives. Still others think it comes from *trux*, "must" (from the Latin *vinum mustum*, "young wine," the pressed juice of grapes mixed with seeds and skin), because actors supposedly performed with their faces tinted with must.

I.2. The Philosophical Relevance of the Etymology of Tragedy

The philosophical attempt to link tragedy to religious festivities in honor of Dionysus suggests a specific meaning for the concept. According to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the Dionysian chaos in tragedy is essential to the personal metamorphosis that it enables. Schopenhauer sees poetic justice and tragedy as standing in opposition to each other:

> The demand for so-called poetical justice rests on an entire misconception of the nature of tragedy, and, indeed, of the nature of the world itself [...]. The true sense of tragedy is the deeper insight, that it is not his own individual sins that the hero atones for, but original sin, i.e., the crime of existence itself.
>
> *(1966, 102)*

Existence comes to us as a riddle: caging this riddle in rationality and logic would make it even more exhaustingly complex. For Schopenhauer, tragedy can be categorized as follows: (1) "by means of a character of extraordinary wickedness […] who becomes the author of the misfortune," (2) "blind fate—i.e., chance and error," and (3) when "characters of ordinary morality […] are so situated with regard to each other that their position compels them, knowingly and with their eyes open, to do each other the greatest injury, without any one of them being entirely in the wrong" (1966, 280).

The third kind of tragedy far surpasses the other two for Schopenhauer. It is the most common form of tragedy that we experience in daily life. In this form, the will's manifestations take full destructive power. We do what is wrong for us and others because we obey a strict logic demanded by our societal role. I will explain this point further in the next section. For now, we can find a brief example of these destructive dynamics in quiet families where the partners do not love each other. They tell themselves that they must remain together for the sake of the image that they project in society (at work) and in their private life (toward their children).

As explained earlier, Nietzsche regards tragedy as a conflict between the Apollonian and the Dionysian: between the godly personifications of rationality and chaos. The Apollonian represents the mask concealing the essential truth of reality. The Dionysian is the chaos that is concealed behind the Apollonian mask. The Dionysian represents the universal reality that is experienced after the loss of individual egoism, according to Schopenhauer. The "Dionysian ecstasy," as Nietzsche understands it, is experienced "not as individuals but as the *one* living being, with whose creative joy we are united" (1967, 104). The chaos unleashed by tragedy frees us from our individual egoism and the illusion of control. It allows us to live in common as a universal human being. According to Nietzsche, the events of a tragedy are "supposed" to discharge pity and fear and are "supposed" to elevate and inspire the triumph of noble principles at the hero's sacrifice.

The essence of this aesthetic effect is that it both reveals and conceals, causing both pain and joy. The drama's display of suffering individuals forces upon the audience "the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena," which in turn communicates "the exuberant fertility of the universal" (1967, 18). The spectators "become, as it were, one with the infinite primordial joy in existence, and […] we anticipate, in Dionysian ecstasy, the indestructibility and eternity of this joy" (1967, 18). Nietzsche writes that there is thus a desire "to see tragedy and at the same time to get beyond all seeing […] to hear and at the same time long to get beyond all hearing" (1967, 57).

It is apparent that tragedy can be a mental state that we visit in our own lives, whether in our daily routine or through an unexpected event. Nussbaum describes tragedy as the condition in which good people happen to do bad things, taking actions that are repugnant to their ethical character (1985, 235). Italian immigration laws offer an unfortunate example of this phenomenon. Sicilian sea people are forbidden from rescuing illegal immigrants that they find dying on their shores or begging for help in their water. Providing help is illegal and punished with prison, even when rescuing children. But it would be tragic for Sicilians to leave immigrants and refugees dying on their land. The tragic conflict between legality and ethical character is evident. Which choice will make our lives bearable? What is the least damage we can do to our integrity? Is it more important to preserve civic friendship or to respect the law?

There is no one right answer to these questions. Tragic situations emphasize the limits of being human. The best choice may be that which emerges from the depths of our emotions. This is what the tragic sense of life does to us—something bad happens to a good person, which compels the good person to raise questions that were inconceivable and even morally repugnant to them before. The tragic sense of life brings meaning; this meaning stems from the irrational or pre-rational sources of our feelings. It makes us more human, as Anne Carson poetically puts it: "To stay human is to break a limitation. Like it if you can. Like it if you dare" (2001, 3).

While this previous form of tragedy has the power to generate justice, there is also a justice coming from tragedy. For example, Lesky (1983) defines tragedy as that which comes from a challenging form of justice (*dyke*). This justice is not consequentialist: it is the Apollonian harmony that follows an orgiastic Dionysian disorder. Justice that comes from tragedy is a new form of order, and it shifts our understanding of human nature. The Holocaust, segregation, and apartheid are all tragic events that modified human lives forever. Gagarin understands tragedy as human growth acting under necessity (1976, 13). We do not choose what happens to us. The admiration we receive after surviving a rough period is purely gratuitous—most of the time we do not have a choice. We just have to do *something*: we must give a direction to our lives according to the existential call that was imposed on us. In the next section, I will consider a case from my practice in which the tragic sense of life was lost, and the consequences that followed.

II. What Does It Mean to Lose the Sense of Tragedy?

The worst form of tragedy, according to Schopenhauer, is that in which characters harm each other knowingly without any of them being entirely in the wrong. I believe that losing the sense of tragedy in our daily lives can lead to this quiet tragedy in which everyone feels as if they are in the right. Forgetting the possibility of tragedy is a trap for our pride (*hubris*), because we may wrongly believe that we have full control of our lives. We can have an excessive degree of trust in the world's rationality, thus forgetting that the seemingly impossible is nonetheless possible. In this section, I will analyze what it means to lose our sense of tragedy. I will look at how the sense of tragedy affects our ability to love ethically. Being aware that tragedy might touch anyone's life compels us to surrender to life's chaos. Through this surrender we accept our limits as human beings and develop a safe communion with and compassion toward each other. Tragedy generates disorder; it resets the rules and allows us to see our limits. We can then reorganize our lives in the acceptance of those limits.

Losing our sense of tragedy may leave us living a robotic, routine life, convinced that what we have depends solely on ourselves. In this worldview, life's unpredictability becomes a strictly logical series of events with no space for contradictions, mistakes, or pre-rational feelings. Such a worldview does not encourage the development of compassion and an open acceptance of human limits. We believe that our social position and material wealth is decisive for our happiness. Conversely, tragedy illuminates our lives' ethical complexity; it deepens our capacity for responsible love because it prompts difficult questions that cannot be ignored.

When facing tragedy or contemplating a tragic outcome, we are compelled to think through different solutions and make the right choice. Hegel's notion of sublation (*Aufhebung*) can help us comprehend the ethical weight of tragedy. *Aufhebung* indicates the ability to overcome a dilemma through a third choice that encompasses the original two. Tragedy compels us to see the third option that otherwise would have not been sought. As Hegel observes, only when we understand the power of the tragic question do we know what arrangements we are capable of making.

II.1. What Did It Mean to Lose the Sense of Tragedy in Natasha's Life?

Tragedy, despair, and sadness are feelings we want to avoid. However, their absence can also have significant consequences, which can paradoxically manifest as true tragedy and despair. My client Natasha was driven to consult me by her despair of reaching a better situation in life. The uneasiness generated by her daily routine pushed her to ask for help; she wanted to grow closer to who she really was.

I do not want to claim that sadness and tragedy must exist in order for goodness and bliss to exist. This would resign us to a worldview in which we are afraid every

time something good happens. Such a worldview would foster an impending sense of doom and an inability to enjoy life's goodness. What I mean instead is that we should remember that tragedy happens. The potentiality of tragedy is what interconnects us.

Natasha was a Northern European woman in her early 30s who seemed to be sensitive, kind, and intelligent. She came to see me because she felt quietly desperate. Before our meeting, she lived her life by the book. She had friends, a decent job, a loving family, and a nice apartment. Everything was as it was supposed to be. But she was desperate, and convinced that it would be rude to share these feelings with anyone. Natasha felt an intense degree of loneliness and rage; she contacted me partly because she was worried about these feelings and partly because she craved intimacy.

Natasha and I worked to bring back the sense of tragedy to her life—to revisit her past and see if anything tragic had taken place. We discovered that she took a harsh perspective on herself, both physically and emotionally. Her unfulfilled expectations caused self-blame, which left no space for her to accept who she really was. She believed that she was unattractive and weird; she would not allow herself to be her true self even around her family. She would project only what she considered to be good. Anything she saw as negative had to be bottled up as much as possible. By doing this, she rejected friends and partners who craved intimate closeness with her.

Natasha wanted to fall in love (she never had) but her defenses were high. She was constantly scared of the unknown. The last time she had felt safe was when she was 10 years old. There was no one with whom she could share her most intimate thoughts—not even with herself, because her strict self-judgment led her to censor her feelings. Her sense of safety depended on how other people saw her: feeling safe meant being liked by others. In order to be safe, therefore, she could not let herself be sad or demanding in case others disliked her. She never enjoyed sex, she never fell in love, and she never revealed her vulnerability to anyone. Her life had to be tragedy-free and problem-free for her to feel safe.

Natasha's lack of the tragic sense was generating a truly tragic situation, as well as unbearable loneliness. It was robbing her of the chance to love herself and others—and to be loved in return. Her anger bubbled up easily: her life felt like an ongoing showcase of perfect choices and right actions. She was exhausted and frustrated because nobody applauded her efforts. It was as if she was performing for an audience who would never understand her intentions or give her the attention she needed.

Natasha and I spent several months together. We analyzed the missing connections in her intimate life; we reviewed her romantic encounters; we acknowledged the difficulties with which life confronted her. Together, we lessened the emotional weight in the heavy judgments she gave herself. As she began to understand the complexity of her life, she was able to see and accept the lives of other people and potential partners. Life was not a series of boxes to check: it was a marvelous and

surprising network of moments. Natasha learned a lot in very little time. Once she let tragedy in, she improved rapidly and joyfully. Her dating method changed drastically. Whereas before she was blind to the other person's life, conceiving of them as a collection of boxes to check, after our work she took a real interest in the other person. She had changed her worldview. Until that point, unfulfilled expectations meant rejection: now that she had developed compassion toward her own life, she could cultivate curiosity toward another person's life. Curiosity is a form of little care—as is demonstrated by its etymology, from the Latin *cura*—that we provide for those we encounter on our path. Defining another person as a list of expectations is a set-up for disappointment and rejection. Maintaining a genuine curiosity for what the other person's life means and can bring to our life is key to enjoyment.

II.2. Interpreting Natasha's Story Using Literature

Natasha was living in a logical and rational world where a predictable consequence must follow every action. But this limited perspective could not be expanded to the fullness of life. By trying to do so, she made the fatal mistake (*hamartia*) that Aristotle identified as characteristic to tragedy: she thought she could control her life entirely—*hubris*. Admitting that she was miserable and lonely was difficult; it took courage because she felt ashamed of what she had achieved. If she had done everything right, she was supposed to feel happy and fulfilled. She was ashamed because deep down she thought that it must be her fault if she felt bad.

According to Solomon (2010), losing the tragic sense of life leads to a worldview in which we blame victims rather than feeling compassion for them. We deny tragedy by assigning blame. Limiting the complexity of life to a specific logic turns life into a chain of cause and effect with no room for the unpredictability of love, compassion, and care. Instead, we get blame and judgments. We grow convinced that if we just do the right thing, if we stick to the plan, then God or Reason will reward us.

I believe that the search for meaning is the goal of tragedy. Being in contact with tragedy pushes us to connect with the deepest meaning of our actions, to interrogate ourselves about the course of our life. When Natasha felt close to the third sense of tragedy as described by Schopenhauer, she started to interrogate how she was living. Natasha, her family, and her friends were harming each other—albeit in a reasonable and polite way. There was no space in their world for sadness and loneliness; there was no reason to fail at work. Everything had to be successful. The mask of normal life was suffocating, and Natasha's rage was growing behind it.

St. Augustine challenges this rationalistic view of life in light of "the problem of evil" (1950). As he shows, human beings seem to be stuck in meaningless suffering despite the goodness of God. It is our duty to challenge the facade of that meaninglessness—it is also the ultimate problem of tragedy. Similarly, the

existentialist Unamuno believes that the religious and tragic sense of life animates and renovates our life across the generations.[2] We are not in control of our destiny. We, like everyone else, can make a fatal mistake that which can change the course of our lives. Sometimes we do not even need to make mistakes to undergo difficulties. Sometimes we just face challenging periods and try to gather meaning from them. After Natasha put aside the mask of her logic, she allowed herself to be vulnerable with her mother and friends. She was seen by them. In that vulnerability she reduced the distance between her and her rational judgmental self. She got what she craved: intimacy and love. In her case, it was not religion but a religious faith in logical rationality that distanced her from her real self. The rational God behind her worldview would love and reward her only if she was likeable (by others) and successful (on other people's criteria).

Unamuno's "tragic sense of life" provides an example of how to challenge this religious belief in rationality by cracking open the crisis of sense that human existence must necessarily face. Even if we live a decent, quiet life with no drama, tragedy—the potential crisis of sense, the contrast between Apollonian and Dionysian—may nonetheless occur. Camus (1955) would later say that it is precisely our ability to confront the absurd that gives life meaning: the rebellion against reason, to believe passionately what cannot be believed rationally. In the last section of this chapter, I will use Antigone's and Creon's story to emphasize how important this rebellion is.

In her quiet way, Natasha had to rebel against what she was taught and what she believed to be rational conduct. According to the unwritten rules that her parents taught her, it was rude to tell a friend how she was really feeling. Consequently, most of her friends felt rejected by her coldness. The distance of that coldness was tragic; that she could not see it made her even more akin to one of Schopenhauer's characters. She was doing the right thing, after all.

It took an act of rebellion against rationality and an act of passionate faith toward the irrational for Natasha to start opening up with me and then her friends. In her own way, she turned into an anarchist. She began to believe in the power of attracting good things—a belief that was diametrically opposed to her former rational assumptions. Her capacity for love and intimacy grew: she gained a *real* understanding of the right things to do in her relationships. I term this a "real" understanding because it was no longer grounded in others' people rules. Instead, it was grounded in herself and what she considered to be meaningful. She made new friends. Those who could not make space for her new self were lovingly let go, because they no longer matched what she was looking for.

Frustration, loss, and failure are inevitable. But if we make space for their eventuality, then we can assign them meaning when they occur. If we see them as the by-product of an absurd error in the system, then we inevitably feel guilty and ashamed.

Rollo May's reading (2009) of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1996) clearly explains this sense of real tragedy in daily life. Willie, the salesman protagonist

of this story, is just a man who strongly believes in his job. He takes his life seriously, thinking that hard work and correct conduct will bring him salvation. "I don't say he is a great man," says his wife, "but he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid [...] he's only a little boat looking for a harbor" (1996, 39). Willie does the right thing, but changing times do not allow him to achieve the expected stability. He "never knew who he was" (1996, 39). "The flaw, or crack in the tragic character," Miller writes, "is really nothing—and need be nothing—but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are 'flawless.' Most of us are in that category" (1996, 39). Miller continues by observing that the quality of tragedy which shakes us "derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this. [...] The tragic character is one who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity." And "the tragic right is a condition of life, a condition in which the human personality is able to flower and realize itself" (1996, 39). Without a sense of tragedy, we cannot set necessary changes in motion. Natasha, like Willie, took her existence seriously; she did everything right, but as she approached her 30s her life grew in misery. She wanted to fall in love. This change could happen only when she gave up on her conviction in blind rationality: she needed to search for the real significance of human life. As May writes, "Tragedy implies a profound respect for the human being and a devotion to his rights and destiny—otherwise it just doesn't matter whether Orestes or Lear or you or I fall or stand in our struggles" (2009, 51).

Despite the usual negative meaning we attribute to it, real tragedy is a song—a joyous and chaotic song for a goat. Tragedy is our liberation from the masks we feel compelled to wear. The absence of tragedy, or the willing rejection of tragedy, is the real tragedy. It robs us of meaning; loneliness and quiet desperation is the consequence if no rebellion is made. As Miller notes, "Tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and [...] its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker's brightest opinions of the human animal." (1996, 39) The tragic view indicates that we take human freedom, and its need to realize itself, seriously: it demonstrates our belief in the "indestructible will of humans to achieve their humanity" (1996, 39). It is a matter of luck—luck in the Greek sense, as "something that can happen" (*tugkano*) or a "mysterious destiny" (*tyche*). The sense of the mystery and magic that tragedy unfolds is key to gratitude, care, and compassion.

III. Tragedy, Antigone, and a Peculiar Blindness

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of enjoying Sophocles' *Antigone* in theaters across the world. The performance that stayed with me the most took place in a

small theater close to the Tenderloin in San Francisco. The Tenderloin is a very poor neighborhood at the outskirts of the expensive, hi-tech, and glamorous Bay Area. It bears its name because police personnel used to receive a tenderloin as an incentive for patrolling the area. The neighborhood has improved since those days, but it is still rough and very poor.

Leaving the theater, I asked myself why they had not set their production of *Antigone* on the local streets. I saw many Antigones, Ismenes, and Creons on the street, fighting their daily battle to survive. For some, it would be their last battle. There are those who try to help, but something prevents them from succeeding: human limits. We live in a society full of contradictions and painful tragedies because we all have an *omma deinon*—a defective sight. Human beings so often see only what they want to see and hear only what they want to hear (*Antigone*, v. 457). This defective sight (*omma deinon*) is the attitude in which we naturally live. We do so in order to function in a society that demands that we do not take the "sun's stance" (Nussbaum 1986, 72). The sun's stance implies an ability to see everything at once: it would be too painful for us to endure. Our defective sight allows us to keep our sanity. From the Platonic myth of the cave through to Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, we learn what responsible sight is: what we should aim at and be afraid of at the same time. If we see too much, all at once our existence is in peril. Antigone's tragic rebellion is a sunrise that illuminates life to its fullest but also brings destruction. Creon, Antigone's uncle, considers rebelliousness to be the city's worst disease, precisely because rebelliousness sheds its full light on things as they are.[3] In *Political Emotions* (2013), Nussbaum talks about eudaimonistic judgment (a judgment aimed at well-being) and practical rationality (*phronesis*) as a mid-ground between *omma deinon* and the sun's stance.

In the next section, I will tell Antigone's story. Doing so, I will show how practical rationality (*phronesis*) unfolds as the ability to live with the tragic sense of life. *Phronesis* teaches us how to think through our feelings and make meaningful choices. Through *phronesis*, we feel what we are living without denying the depth of its mystery; we accept life's unpredictable consequences in exchange for a kinship and felt understanding with other human beings. By allowing the sense of tragedy into our lives, we cease to feel alone: instead, we find ourselves in a mysterious web of incredible experiences.

III.1. Antigone

According to Nussbaum, *Antigone* is a play about *phronesis*. It begins with "Do you know," and ends with "Practical wisdom is the most important constituent of human good living" (1986, 43). Practical rationality is a form of healthy rationality that we can gain from the tragic sense of life; it increases our capacity to love ourselves and others in an ethical way. *Phronesis* is a way to be present to ourselves while we are acting in the world.

The major characters, Creon (Antigone's uncle), Ismene (Antigone's sister), and Antigone, are locked in a system of obligations. Despite the love that they share, there is an inescapable sense of necessity that leads them to harm each other.

Antigone is part of a trilogy that centers on the house of Thebes. It is the continuation of Oedipus' story. Oedipus, King of Thebes, has died at Colonus. His two daughters, Antigone and Ismene, and his son, Eteocles, continue to live in their father's palace. Oedipus' second son, Polynices, makes war against Thebes to regain power, and the two brothers kill each other. Their uncle Creon becomes the king: he declares Polynices to have acted against the law and Eteocles to be the defender of Thebes. He denies Polynices an honored burial. Whoever breaks this law and gives Polynices a burial will be stoned to death.

Antigone cannot stick to this law: it betrays what she believes to be the right thing to do. She gives her brother the burial. Her rebellion against her uncle's law is the tragic theme of the play. Antigone buries Polynices because she believes in the *nomos empsychos*, the law of the heart, over the written law of the government. Creon needs to show firm leadership of his country, so he must punish her. Creon's decision to execute Antigone is opposed by Ismene, Haimon, and Teiresias. Ismene is Antigone's sister. She initially refuses to help Antigone because she is afraid of Creon's law. But when Antigone is condemned to death, Ismene decides to follow her sister against Creon. Haimon is Creon's son; he is betrothed to Antigone. He tries to change Creon's mind by telling him that the public do not want to see Antigone being punished. He reminds his father that if Antigone dies, her death will be followed by another. Haimon believes Antigone's action is honorable. Finally, Teiresias is a blind soothsayer. He foresees Creon's mistake and advises him against it, warning the king about impending calamity. Creon rejects Teiresias' advice to set Antigone free.

Antigone and Creon are both stuck in their defective sight that stops them from seeing each other's sense of justice. The righteousness that they each feel in relation to the burial entails blame for the other. They can see the strict logic of their own reasoning, but do not leave space for the full picture. They become tragic characters. The problem is crystallized in their dispute about Polynices' burial: Creon believes himself to be protecting the public welfare whereas Antigone believes that she is protecting what is religiously right. They each strongly believe that their reason is the Reason that regulates the world. Antigone and Creon are both motivated by good intentions: good judgment (*euboulia*), autonomy (*autonomia*), and responsibility. They act against each other based on the values of their society; they are trapped by the logic of their roles. Creon advocates a civic sentiment of friendship, Ismene advocates love (*philia*) toward the city and the family to which they belong, and Antigone advocates a pious defense of the religious laws. As Hegel argues, each protagonist is narrow-minded and fails to see the others' points of view. Their situation does not *need* to become tragic. That it becomes so is the fault of logic.

There are at least three forms of logical good at work in the play; each one of them is apparently rational. Creon accuses his niece Antigone of having broken the laws of the state. Antigone accuses Creon of having broken religious laws by having denied her brother a funeral. The Chorus accuses Antigone of being trouble, just like her father. Which form of rightness should prevail: the political, religious, or familial?

Antigone's religious feelings collide with Creon's sense of justice (*dike*): "My voice is the one voice giving orders in this city! The state is the king. That much is sure!" (v.596). Creon thinks in terms of the city's health; he neglects the "unwritten laws" of family obligation. Antigone is concerned with what is right for the family, failing to recognize the city's crisis. As Haemon points out, Creon fails to recognize that citizens are also family members: a protector of the city who neglects family values is hardly protecting the city at all. Antigone fails to realize that families also live in cities, which must survive if the survival of the family is to be ensured. Antigone may be in touch with an eternal law, but Creon thunders that "there is no evil greater than that of anarchy!" (v.672). Political insurrection would compromise the well-being of all the citizens. Both Antigone and Creon have a poor understanding of what is valuable, despite their logical reasoning. They make poor ethical judgments accordingly.

Tragedy promotes anarchy. Accepting the tragic sense of life means questioning the logic of our lives, subverting the rules in search for more appropriate meaning. Anarchy is the opportunity to find new meanings. The goodness that we may uncover will not necessarily accord with everyone else's sense of rightness. The justice of the tyrant versus the justice of the anarchist: Anouilh attends to this tension in his rendition of *Antigone* (1951). France was divided into those who supported the Nazi regime and those who were in favor democracy; both systems were logical until rebellion cracked their systematic rules. What is a law when the constitutive rules of the State and its smaller units (such as families and relationships) disappear?[4]

If life is a logical system whose rules are established by an external ruler, who tells us the difference between right and wrong when that ruler changes? As Creon says, "How dreadful it is when the right judge judges wrong." Antigone's answer is *autognoteos orga*: a self-known passion.[5] Such a passion distinguishes right from wrong according to a felt-sensed instinct. This *autognoteos orga* is a practical reason (*phronesis*) that gives us the sense of what we are doing while we are doing it. Only political emotions can bridge the deep irrational contrasts between what is right in society and what is right in individuals' personal lives. Creon realizes his mistake. After doing so, he has a greater understanding of himself and the world: his experience of suffering allows him to gain a more substantial awareness. The tragedy of these characters casts light on a new value, that of *autos gnotos orga* (self-known actions, v.875). The tragedy's highest value is the self-known passion that alone can ground a true *autonomia*: the ability to give ourselves a system of laws that are congruent with our being.

Derrida writes that life is a limit event. Antigone is in love with the impossible; she is faithful to what is impossible because her life is an event whose limits have not yet been explained. But she decides to embrace her destiny and be faithful to her own life. She embraces the tragic sense of life and builds her ethics on that acceptance. The Chorus sums up the issue in the play's final lines: "Good reasoning (*phronein*) is by far the most important part of a well lived life. One must not dishonor any of the spheres protected by the gods. The big speeches of arrogant people receive big blows as their payment, and these blows teach good reasoning in old age" (*Antigone*, vv.1262–4).

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the importance of the sense of tragedy. I aimed to show how the lack of tragedy can lead to loneliness and poor ethical judgment. After having described the origin of the word "tragedy" and the polarity that the word describes, I used the example of a client to show how the lack of the tragic sense can lead to loneliness and blindness. I reinforced this argument through my reading of Antigone's and Creon's conflict. I proposed *phronesis*, practical reason, and self-known passions (*autognoteos orga*) as the ethical solutions for overcoming this defective sight (*omma deinon)* and improving our capacity to make loving ethical choices.

Ethical Takeaway

Avoid getting stuck in logic: there are many different logics out there. Appreciate life's unpredictability and make space for its logics and surprises.

Exercises

These exercises are aimed at reinforcing our "sight" and avoiding a defective way of looking at things. The goal is to open our eyes and reaffirm our passionate commitment to life's surprises even when solutions seem impossible. The final goal is to set in motion that practical rationality (*phronesis*) that helps us to reason with our feelings and accordingly to keep our eyes open to the mystery of life.

1. Ask yourself what it is that you will experience once your dreams come true. Instead of waiting for your dreams to happen, you can consider the qualities that are important for you to embrace now. Try to find the source of what you desire and why it seems like the solution to your problems.
2. If you feel as if you are going through a tragic period in your life, try not to close off that tragedy. Without overextending yourself, try to give others what

you expect to receive from them. More importantly, try to give yourself what you expect to receive from others. Make a list of three things that are essential for you to change your status. Invite this list to manifest in your thoughts through a meditative state. Note down the qualities you consider important for your tragic situation to end (how that person can be at peace with you; what the lover you want should look like; how your job could be better).

3. When you are going through a tragic period, it is normal to attend to what you are not experiencing or will never be able to experience again. This may enforce an awareness of what you lack. It is therefore important to readjust your sight and reinforce your awareness of all that you already have. It might be useful to give thanks to those things that can help you reconnect with yourself and with your life. I am referring here to experiences as simple as going to buy food at the market: be grateful for the road that allows you to get there and for the many hands that were involved in the experience.
4. Trust in momentum. Life is changing all the time. Tragedy, whether loud or quiet, is a sign of change that soon will bring new opportunities. When we expand into greater use of our own potential, discomfort can arise. This may mean that life is inviting you into something far fuller. The unknown can feel daunting, but you should persevere if it also feels good. This is a good time to dream of the life you want for yourself. Automatic drawing and can help with this. Without thinking, draw whatever comes to you on a piece of paper and return to it during the day. You can do the same thing with writing.

Alternatively, you may want to record your voice or a video talking about your dreams. The important part of this exercise is the moment where you revisit what you have done and assign it meaning. This meaning does not need to remain rigid: it can change as often as you need.

Notes

1 More male than female characters are considered in Aristotle's *Poetics*, hence the non-neutral gender pronoun.
2 See, for example, Unamuno's work *Aunt Tula* (De Unamuno & Biggane 2013).
3 It is not by mistake that Anouilh's *Antigone* became the symbol for Vichy rebels. Antigone was a Nazi! In Anouilh's play Kreon did not even want to condemn her: he did not want to be the king. But rules are necessary to avoid a city becoming like a ship in a storm without a captain. As Dante writes, "*nave senza nocchier in gran tempesta*." Rebelliousness is the worst plague for a healthy city.
4 Several critics support this interpretation, including Linforth (1961), Santirocco (1980), and Segal (1981).
5 Hegel (1977, 270) does not conclude that Creon and Antigone are each right to pursue a fanatical course that avoids all tragedy. He concludes that they are blind and obtuse because they refuse to recognize values that should rightly be recognized.

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5

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OR HEALTHY BOUNDARIES?

Introduction

Kubler-Ross (1997) writes that to love and to be loved unconditionally is the ultimate lesson of human life. But this lesson comes with ethical and psychological challenges. If we decide to love unconditionally, then how do we avoid getting lost in each other's lives? Does unconditional love involve extreme self-sacrifice? Do we need to be saints to love someone unconditionally?

Unconditional love carries with it several existential dilemmas. For the sake of our well-being and relationships, we must clarify to what extent we are willing to love someone else despite the fears that this love elicits. The implicit threat that love always contains may condition our capacity for love in our daily life. Love, particularly unconditional love, generates feelings that we judge according to our internal moral compass. Being clear about the ethical stance that frames our loving feelings helps us gain a full picture of our behavior in relationships.

For example, we may judge unconditional love to be impossible or even harmful, because love with no conditions supposedly makes martyrs out of us. Such a judgment implicitly supports a utilitarian notion of love: I love if I receive what I need in return. I therefore love my partner if she is kind to me and listens to me when I need her to. *Mutatis mutandis*, I am worthy of love if I can be kind and attentive toward my partner. If I have something to give, then love is on the table. If I have nothing to give because I am sick and depressed, then I am unworthy of being loved. This is one of the many possible patterns for the interaction between love and ethics, but it is one which can drain our energy. I believe that ethical dynamics are possible that make us feel less broken when we need unconditional love.

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In this chapter, I will present my interpretation of unconditional love and the ethical impact this interpretation has on the issues above. I believe that unconditional love consists of our ability to see the true nature of our loved ones as beings who are different from us. I will first use Antigone and Ismene's story to elucidate the dynamics of unconditional love. Second, I will investigate the words that we use for this feeling in religion, philosophy, and psychology to show the progressive sense of responsibility that this love demands from us. Third, I will reflect on the implication of this notion in our daily life. Unconditional love is considered a dangerous myth in our society.[1] But I believe it is important to own our responsibility in this form of love in order to contribute to a better society. The main question I will address in this chapter is "Can we own unconditional love without being burned by it?"

I. Ismene's Unconditional Love for Her Sister

We looked at Antigone's tragedy in Chapter 4. We explored the difficult dilemmas that Antigone faces in her attempt to remain authentic to herself and to her love toward her family.[2] However, we did not address Ismene and her psychology. In the play, Antigone and Ismene are two sisters who love each other. But Ismene's love for her sister is often overlooked. Ismene seems to accept how Antigone handles the dilemmas afflicting her family. Her attitude is cowardly, according to some interpretations (see Lacan 1959). Ismene's temperament would lead her to handle the conflict in a more peaceful way, but she accepts Antigone's behavior despite being hurt by her sister's decisions.

Unlike Lacan and other scholars who do not grant Ismene any ethical agency, I think we can find an active form of unconditional love in this character. This love is expressed in the sororal bond that keeps the two women together. Honig (2011, 34) writes: "For centuries, Ismene has been cast as the inert, drab backdrop against which her more colorful sister stands out. Antigone is the active lover while Ismene is the passive invisible witness." Antigone is heroic, Ismene cowardly. Žižek's reading tries to preserve both characters: he balances Antigone's power of action with Ismene's ongoing effort to tame her sister's fire (1989, 116–17). On Žižek's interpretation, Ismene is the gentle protector of her family; she evokes our compassion as a quiet, self-sacrificing character.

It may be easier for us to identify with Ismene than with the rebellious and tragic Antigone. Antigone goes to the limits. She does not give up on her desire, incarnating a death force that ruptures the unsaid compromises of daily life. Ismene appears to be more human; she is prepared to compromise for the sake of coexistence. Frank remarks on Ismene's patience: she bides her time, whereas Antigone is too quick to act, too fiery to be truly effective (2006). Despite the criticisms that feminists have levied against Ismene's temperament, I am not alone in thinking that Ismene's understated manners are more relatable than Antigone's martyrdom (Rawlinson 2014). In Ismene, it is easier to find that daily unconditional love that

we choose throughout our lives. This is why I use her and not Antigone to discuss the ethics of unconditional love.

Ismene's quiet acceptance speaks volumes about her love for her sister and her family. Ismene sees and understands the limits of each family member: she accepts them by simply staying and being tolerant of them. This is an important component of unconditional love.

Ismene does more than survive. As Zupančič remarks (1998), Ismene sacrifices herself in her creative response to a series of forced choices. For Lacan (1959), a forced choice is a crossroads that we cannot avoid. We must consciously choose how to face it. Ismene wants to die with Antigone but agrees to go on living without her. When she does so, she does not choose survival and avoid death (*contra* Lacan, Žižek, and various feminist readers of the play). Her choice is not rooted in convenience but in love. She performs what Lacan calls an ethical act: she confronts her own limits and does not back down. Her limit is not death, but a living death. She pushes her own boundaries in deciding to continue living in the house of her sister's killer. Not only does she give up on her desire to fight alongside her sister, Ismene also accepts her survival of her family's disintegration and lives in the house of the person responsible. She does not avoid what love requires of her: that is, to love and respect her sister's choices. She accepts what life throws at her and transforms the factual relational bond between her and Antigone.

In life, we inevitably find ourselves in a net of factual interconnections. This net entails challenges and choices to be made; even avoiding them would be a choice. Any relationship involves relational requests and demands to handle situations. Sacrifices, like those accomplished by Ismene, are ethical acts with which we choose how to adjust our life creatively to our relational connections. Being a sister, parent, teacher, or any other role necessitates a relational demand that we must decide how to fulfill. We feel an imperative to care and love in every human bond: what we do with that feeling is an ethical choice. In certain situations, we might be led to think that the only answer to that imperative is sacrifice. But I do not believe that unconditional love necessarily involves sacrifice—at least not in the sense that we usually mean. If we interpret the word "(self-)sacrifice" etymologically (that is, making (*facere*) your self sacred (*sacer*), then the connection between unconditional love and self-sacrifice is reasonable. If we take self-sacrifice as an act of self-suppression that leads to misery, however, then I do not see any connection between the two.

In unconditional love, more than in any other form, we are called to make reasoned ethical decisions about our bond with loved ones. Ismene sacrifices herself to the bond she has with her sister in the sense that she makes that bond sacred. She shows unconditional love for her sister in the form of creative choices she makes when faced with her destiny. In Ismene's situation, any choice she makes is destined to become important, even the choice to keep herself to herself. A sacrifice implies a decision made in full conscience. In this case Ismene decides to see

her sister's essence and to respect her. She decides to love Antigone regardless of what she can gain from her choices. In that act, their bond becomes sacred.

I.1. The Sororal Bond and the Unconditionality of Their Love

Antigone was celebrated by Hegel as the familial heroine of burial and the guardian of the dead (1977, 275), while Agamben saw in her a witness protesting the injustice of her brother's treatment (1998). Ismene, on the other hand, is often interpreted as a character who acts according to political universals, such as the simple awareness of one's own mortality (White 2009) or the vulnerability that makes us all capable of grief (Butler 2004).

The sororal sacrifice that Ismene makes is two-way; it stems out of unconditional love for each sister's limits. Antigone ultimately sacrifices herself not just for the "ungrievable" (as Butler puts it) dead brother but also for a living equal: her sister. Antigone vows this sacrifice when she tells Ismene to go on living, saying "My death will be enough" (547 [617]). And Ismene acknowledges her sister's gift by ceasing from remonstrating with her and accepting her own fate. Unlike Ismene, Antigone is bound to action and to another kind of love.

The idea that political action is heroic has blinded us to the power of the sororal bond. Antigone's kenotic (self-emptying) love for her brother is equaled by Ismene's unconditional love for her. Ismene's love is less loud but no less meaningful.

Ismene and Antigone nurture a love for each other that goes beyond words or practical explanations. They love each other and are willing to sacrifice themselves—to make their bond sacred—in order to respect their loved ones' essence. Their situation is comparable to the experience of people whose loved ones are consumed by addiction. Loving those with addictions puts us in a similar position to Ismene's: we see a loved one consuming their own life in search for a destructive meaning. Being there for them is an overwhelming ethical task. It is an act of unconditional love to see the existential limits of those suffering souls and love them regardless. It requires ethical commitment and a deep, wise form of love. Setting conditions ("I will love you if you stop drinking") would force a distance that none of the parties feel or want.

It is possible to set existential boundaries and state: "I will not be able to live with you while you are drinking." But these boundaries do not necessarily entail "I will no longer love you." It is important to see this difference: setting existential boundaries is not the same as setting conditions on love. Existential boundaries do not automatically entail emotional boundaries. We must witness how expansive our hearts can be despite the limits of our human condition. We might feel discouraged when faced with children consumed by addiction; it is important to set existential boundaries for them. But it is useless and painful to pretend that these boundaries concern our capacity to love. Equating boundaries with our

capacity to love is a lie we tell ourselves to be strong. In the long run, however, this produces more pain than it can ease.

Something similar happens in this narrative. Ismene expresses horror and shock at the thought of defying Creon. She tries to dissuade Antigone from committing this act. She chooses human over divine law. She expresses confidence that the dead will forgive her for this choice. But she says more as well. At the end of one of their harsh exchanges in the first scene, Ismene declares her love for Antigone despite their disagreements.[3] Ismene says "You are truly dear to the ones who love you." This is not a regretful apology, a request for forgiveness, or an indulgent or resigned "Whatever you do, we love you anyway." More quietly than Antigone, Ismene makes ethical choices and acts upon her love for her sister. Unlike Antigone, Ismene is not inclined to transgress Creon's law. She sees no honor in behaving like her sister, only danger and disobedience. She gives up on the idea that women are "not born to contend with men," that submission is the sisters' lot (61–2). If she buries Polynices, she does it not from political principles but for her sister, and possibly for her brother too. Creon says, first of Ismene, that she has been "plotting in the dark" (494) and then adds, regarding Antigone: "Oh but I hate it more when a traitor, caught red-handed, tries to glorify his crimes."

Creon demands Ismene's presence in the palace. Her actions speak as loud as Antigone's.

As she enters, Creon turns his attention on her, once again stumbling upon some truths: "You—in my own house, you viper, slinking undetected, sucking my life-blood! I never knew I was breeding twin disasters, the two of you rising up against my throne. Come, tell me, will you confess your part in the crime or not? Answer me. Swear to me" (531–5). Having indeed slunk undetected to perform the first burial of Polynices, Ismene now speaks: "I did it, yes" (536). Her love is truly ethical. She makes decisions and takes responsibility, even if what is done does not accord with her desires.

The two sisters fight, one tries to protect the other, and destiny presents itself. When Ismene begs, "Oh no, my sister, don't reject me, please, let me die beside you, consecrating the dead together" (544–5), and Antigone responds with, "Never share my dying, don't lay claim to what you never touched," we may imagine these words as a cold, demeaning rejection. But we can also hear them said with tenderness, resignation, and sacrifice. It is a delicate line to walk. Antigone mocks her sister in order to spare Ismene her own destiny. Antigone immediately makes this clear: "You're right," she says, "if I mock you, I get no pleasure from it, only pain" (551). Antigone hints that her goal is to save Ismene, who should go on living. Ismene accepts Antigone's subtle instructions: "Tell me dear one, what can I do to help you even now?" (552). Her sister's answer is straightforward: "Save yourself. I don't begrudge you your survival" (553). This answer is a gift: it marks a shift from her earlier position when she did indeed begrudge Ismene's focus on survival. Here that choice is affirmed, not mocked.

When Antigone says "My death will be enough," she demands that Ismene go on living, although her life will be in the household of the man responsible for her sister's death. Saving yourself is a rough gift indeed. Ismene's quiet acceptance of continued life is a form of true unconditional love, in front of Antigone's kenotic (self-emptying) love. Whereas the former has to see the essence of her sister's character, the latter has to accomplish a procedural act of love to return justice to mortal and immortal life.

I.2. Commenting on the Story

What are the ethical choices that guide the decisions made by this play's protagonists? Creon's behavior clearly implies a utilitarian ethical view. This view leads to a form of conditional love in which:

> I love x if y, z, and w.

It follows that if y, z, and w are not achieved then a state of *no* love is acceptable. However, accepting such a state is dangerous for our personal and societal well-being. Accepting a lack of love for someone—your challenging son, your difficult student, or your politically disloyal nephew (for Creon)—may create a space for hate, resentment, and numbness. These feelings will be projected in the outside world, inflicting damage on their recipients and ourselves. As previously discussed, a tragic chain of events only can occur in a space with no compassion and mutual care.

Arendt considers love, more than its negation, to be a dangerous feeling for politics. She writes in *The Human Condition* that "Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all anti-political forces" (1953, 58). Love is anti-political because it is an exclusionary force. The love I nurture for my partner excludes other potential partners. The love I feel for my family leads me to behave poorly toward others: I want to feed my family first. According to Arendt, making space for love in politics is oxymoronic: the essence of love is antipolitical. For Arendt, love and hatred ultimately belong together.

However, Arendt's notion of *amor mundi* (love of the world) is very close to the notion of unconditional love I am defending. It has the same pervasive quality that I mentioned above. To paraphrase Arendt's letter to Jaspers (August 6, 1955), she says that love of the world is about understanding and reconciling one's self with the world as it is. We must "face and come to terms with what really happened": the Holocaust, for instance, or the great and small injustices that pervade our life. Leaving the space to love, meant here as acceptance and the capacity to see reality for what it truly is, can be the first step toward a better life. *Amor mundi* is far from a utilitarian ethics of love. I do not consider my partner, neighbor, or country lovable if they meet x, y, or z conditions. Instead, I leave myself open to seeing what

they truly are and live accordingly. In the story I told, Creon becomes blind to the existence of everyone who does not respect his laws; he literally destroys the lives of those against him. Ismene and Antigone struggle to see and understand each other, but eventually they accept the lot that has been given to them and love each other for who they are.

If, like Creon, we set conditions on love ("I can love only the people in my family" or "I can love only people who are loyal to me") then everything and everyone that fails to meet these conditions deserves our indifference at best, our contempt at worst. The space is open for hatred and exclusion to enter—in this sense, Arendt is right. If love were conditional and utilitarian, then it would be an exclusionary anti-political force.

From Freud (1924) to Marcuse (1974) and Fromm (1959), love has been depicted as the vital principle; it is set against its counterpart, *Thanatos* (death). Love tries to keep living beings together and to move life forward. But if this unconditional connecting love went missing, it would be a serious problem for individuals and their communities.

What makes unconditional love difficult is not loving *per se*, but the unconditional ethical acceptance that is usually attached to it. Let me clarify this point with a simple example. No one wants to have their sandwich spoiled by ants. But if ants approach our sandwich, our first response is not to kill the insect, but to move our sandwich or remove the insect from the house. We see the ant, recognize its nature, and move our food away from it. We know that it is in the insect's nature to spoil our food, so we do not let it get to our food in the first place.

This is how it should be with unconditional love. We confuse ethical judgment with our capacity to love. The ability to see a radically different being such as an ant, which is potentially conflicting with our nature and habits, does not take anything away from that being's lovability. If anything, being able to see that form of life enriches our powers of observation and the diversity of our biosphere. Indeed, I believe that impoverished biodiversity goes hand in hand with the widespread belief in the unfeasibility of unconditional love.

Unconditional love does not mean that we must unconditionally blur personal boundaries and accept martyrdom. I might discover aspects of myself that I do not like, but this does not mean that I should not love them: I know that repressing or rejecting the shameful parts of myself will generate problems that I cannot foresee. Being able lovingly to see what is not immediately lovable in us and accept its nature is the first step toward healthy boundaries and healing.

In what follows, I will consider the ethical boundaries applicable to unconditional love. Beginning with a discussion of the term *agape*, which is often connected to unconditional love, I will move to analyzing the notion of love as it appears in Empedocles, Plato, and Aristotle. I will then conclude with what psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology has to say about the concept. In this historical review of ideas, note that human beings move from the position of being solely recipients to being depicted as increasingly *responsible* for unconditional and forgiving love.

Given the dilemma with which love confronts us, the questions with which I will wrestle in this chapter are:

1. What are the ethical boundaries of unconditional love? Should we accept our children if they intentionally cause harm to ourselves and others? Should we endure abusive relationships with our romantic partners, parents, or siblings?
2. Is unconditional love our ultimate goal? If it is, are we not confined by kenosis and self-sacrifice? Or, conversely, is unconditional love self-centered and self-indulgent?
3. How does unconditional love apply in society—with cases of fanatical nationalism, for instance? Is it appropriate to apply unconditional love during trials against Nazi leaders? Is unconditional love synonymous with altruism?

II. *Agape* and the Christian Tradition

The word "*agape*" was adopted by Christianity to refer to divine unconditional love. According to a particular Christian perspective, love is a divine emanation of grace. The love that God has for us is unconditional, regardless of what we feel for God or the harm that we might do. After all, Christians hold that God loved all humans unconditionally by sending his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins (John 3:16). "Love is the only norm," Fletcher claims (1966, 69).

It is not clear from this perspective whether human beings are actually capable of experiencing the magnitude of this love. In a beautiful passage from *The Unicorn*, Iris Murdoch writes:

> "Well—you know that I love you," said Marian [...] "Yes. Thank you. I think, don't you, that one ought to cry out for more love, to ask for it. It's odd how afraid people are of the world. Yet we all need love. Even God needs love. I suppose that's why He created us."
>
> "He made a bad arrangement," said Marian, smiling [...] "You mean because people don't love Him? Ah, but they do. Surely we all love Him under some guise or other. We have to. He desires our love so much, and a great desire for love can call love into being." [...] "In a way you can't love something that isn't there. I think if you really love, then something *is* there. But I don't understand these things."
>
> *(Murdoch 1963, 53)*

In this short dialogue, love is the power that calls the nature of God into existence. Love *is* God and God *is* Love. The desire for love is the conatus to existence that calls all living things into being. Here, love becomes the divine structure of being.

"We all need love" because we all need to be in order to exist in this world. "Even God needs love" *to be* among us; *we are* because of God's love.

As Kevin J. Vanhoozer puts it, "the problem is not that God loves, but rather what God's love is?" (2001,7). For instance, love appears to be the highest virtue that Paul presents: "but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13).[4] And in the gospels: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the most important commandment. The second is, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:37–40; cf. Mark 12:30–31; Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18). However, while the biblical emphasis on love is apparent, what this love entails and whether it can be achieved by humans has historically been more difficult to ascertain. The law is love, but we do not know if humans are capable of *embodying* this law or if they can merely *obey* it as compliant followers. Is unconditional love a divine obligation that we can never fully grasp, or is it a feeling that stems from the viscera of the human soul?

If we took three major figures in the Christian theology of love, Augustine, Thomas, and Luther, and asked them what unconditional love is, we would receive different answers.[5] Augustine was strongly influenced by Plato and Neoplatonism: he would understand love as beneficence.[6] God is an absolute ontology that is immutable, timeless, and self-sufficient:

> In what way then does He [God] love us? As objects of use or as objects of enjoyment? If He enjoys us, He must be in need of good from us, and no sane man will say that; for all the good we enjoy is either Himself, or what comes from Himself. … He does not enjoy us then, but makes use of us. For if He neither enjoys nor uses us, I am at a loss to discover in what way He can love us.
>
> *(Augustine,* On Christian Doctrine, *1, 31)*

As with Frankena and Atkinson's arguments concerning the risk of narcissism in self-virtuous love (see Chapter 6), this description of unconditional love as free from obligation but moved by its own goodness cannot apply to humans.[7] If it did, we would risk acquiring narcissistic traits that would damage human beings' loving qualities. We might become so proud of the love we are capable of giving that nothing else matters; this quickly leads to self-absorbed behaviors. In Augustine's description of God, unconditional love is a form of absolute beneficence. God's love does not make any use (*uti*) of humans, and it does not need humans to give anything back for them to be loved. The concrete being of God's love is pure beneficence.

Thomas Aquinas would refer to God's love as "*caritas*." Using an ontological standpoint analogous to Augustine's, Aquinas concludes that God's love cannot be

affected by human beings.[8] If God's love were affected by us, it would become imperfect: its being would then not be divine but human.

From a Christian perspective, loving someone unconditionally and charitably is good but does not come easily for humans. As imperfect beings, we can imitate or obey God's love but we do not know how to *embody* it: its perfection exceeds our limited nature. God's love is "an act of will" that moves its timeless being while producing no change in the perfection of its nature:

> Therefore acts of the sensitive appetite, inasmuch as they have annexed to them some bodily change, are called passions; whereas acts of the will are not so called. Love, therefore, and joy and delight are passions; in so far as they denote acts of the intellective appetite, they are not passions. It is in this latter sense that they are in God. Hence the Philosopher says (Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, vii): "God rejoices by an operation that is one and simple," and for the same reason He loves without passion.
>
> *(Aquinas,* Summa Theologiæ *1.20.1)*

God's love is a passionless act of will that gives its grace to others without needing to receive anything in return. For Aquinas, "the will also should be the efficient cause of that act" of love (*Summa Theologiæ* 2–2.23.2). Love and will collapse into each other, because no change would be acceptable in the eternity of its being. Will expresses itself in acts of pure wanting without desires: desire would imply a lack. Love is the capacity to will without desire, but through the movement of the actions with which it comes to life. Unconditional love is a passionless whole that exists just for our being.

God's impassibility is also put forward in Luther's *Theologia Crucis*. For Luther too, God's love is gratuitous and thus unconditional. In giving, it neither receives nor wants to receive anything in return.[9] "Rather than seeking its own good, God's love flows forth and bestows good" (1999, 31:57). Luther writes:

> God's love does not find, but creates, its lovable object; human[10] love is caused by its lovable object […]. Sinners are lovely because they are loved: they are not loved because they are lovely. [L]ove of the cross means … that which takes itself not to where it can find something good to enjoy, but where it may confer good to the wicked and the needy.
>
> *(Luther 1999, 1:36)*

Being part of God's community makes us lovely because we are loved. Being human makes us lovely because we are receiving God's love, no matter how sinful and wicked our life may be. Being loved by God does not mean that we will be able to love ourselves and others in the same way. Unconditional godly love is the vital force that moves our life forwards despite the cross: that is, despite the

mistakes that we make. It is God's job and not ours to move us forward according to love.

Although Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther share a tentative agreement on the meaning of God as love, it is more difficult to understand how humans might embody and connect with this love. From their descriptions there does not seem to be much space to learn from God's love how we can love ourselves and each other. Humans can be grateful for God's generous love, but our sinful condition renders us incapable of embodying it ourselves. We are not capable of divine love because we are imperfect, passionate, and finite. We experience desires and longing.[11] No mutuality or reciprocity is possible between humans, or even between humans and God. If it were, God's divine nature would lose the fullness that characterizes it. Divine love must be merely God's goodness as bestowed upon human recipients who can make no difference to God. We can obey love's law, but cannot fully understand it. As such, divine love amounts to what has been termed by Christians as (thematic) *agape*: pure giving that never receives.

Despite the beauty, grace, and strength of this way of thinking, its influence on believers may have led to unconditional love being seen as something unattainable for human beings. The level of self-sacrifice and blurred boundaries deriving from this godly emanation is such we may be more likely to experience guilt rather than a desire to imitate it. If our limited human nature only allows us to obey and receive love, then we give thanks for this gift, obey its power, and feel guilty for being unable to return it.

When we see unconditional love (*agape*) compared to charitable love, the comparison seems to lead to an ontological and psychological fallacy. *Agape* (often translated as unconditional, thematic, or Christian charitable love) belongs to God's divinity. Human beings are not capable of it by nature, only by communion. Our minds are finite and our souls are trapped in a mortal body. Humans should be charitable, but we are never able to be unconditionally loving because we are human. Hence the fallacy: something divine is a human ought, that is a duty we have to comply to because of our nature. Although Singer informs us about the humanization of *agape* during the Middle Ages and the idealization of its opposite (*eros*) in the Renaissance (Singer 1987), *agape* still seems too demanding for human beings. No wonder we are disinclined to experience this challenging yet rewarding form of love.

From a Christian perspective, unconditional love seems to be beyond human limits. But as we saw in the story of Ismene and Antigone, unconditional love is a human instinct and obligation. It is the living network that moves life forward. We can decide whether to take on this obligation and connect with it in our own creative way. Or we can pass it over. But passing over the opportunity to love unconditionally may result in a loss of meaning. Unconditional love, as Ismene shows us, is challenging. It may be inhuman, in that it demands that we go beyond our human limits. But it often presents us with no alternative. If we truly want to love, the "godly" and "trans-human" experience of love is demanded of us.

II.1. Unconditional Love for Humans

Anders Nygren provides a definition of *agape* that is compatible with human nature. According to him, *agape* belongs distinctly to the Christian tradition and indicates the only true Christian love. This love is:

(1) spontaneous and unmotivated
(2) indifferent to value
(3) creative
(4) the initiator of fellowship.

Whereas the typical human love, *eros*, "is acquisitive desire and longing," *agape* involves a sacrificial giving. For Nygren, *Eros* is an upward movement that connects the human being to God, while *Agape* is downward and it indicates God's way to connect to humans. While "*Eros* is man's effort," whereas "*Agape* is God's grace" (1953, 214). According to him, "*eros* is determined by the quality, the beauty and worth, of its object"; for this reason eros is not spontaneous but 'evoked,' 'motivated,'" whereas *agape* is spontaneous, 'overflowing,' 'unmotivated'. It is a grace that comes to us as a bliss (1953, 214). Consequently, God is the only true agent of love; humans in themselves are incapable of agapic love. Thus, a human loves God only "because God's unmotivated love has overwhelmed them and taken control of them, so that they cannot do anything other than love God" (Nygren 1953, 214). Human to human agapic love may occur, but this love is not *originated* by humans. It is divine love that flows through us (1953, 215). The grandiosity of a love that comes directly as a grace from God, leaves us somewhat unable to willingly connect with it. Hence, this interpretation of *agape* makes human beings into recipients of an overflowing form of love that in psychological terms would infantilize us. God is the father that loves us without us being actually capable of reciprocating a love as overflowing as God's love. As human beings, we would never be able to handle the strength of this love responsibly or reciprocate it. It would accordingly condemn us to a teleological and utilitarian use of love as *eros* that always aims at something and leave us unable to handle the full power of the unconditional love, *agape*.

Numerous questions have been raised regarding Nygren's reconstruction of historical theology, as well as the adequacy of a conception of divine love that rules out mutual divine-human relationships.[12] Reinhold Niebuhr explicitly criticizes Nygren for drawing too sharp a distinction between *agape* and human love (1964, 2, 284). However, although *agape* appears to be a Christian form of unconditional love, the Greek verb *agapao* (to love) often appears in post-Homeric literature. [13] The noun "*agap*e" seems to stem from the Hebrew word for love, *aheb*. As Carson explains, "there are excellent diachronic reasons in Greek philology to explain the rise of the [*agape*] word group, so one should not rush too quickly toward theological explanations" (2000, 27).

Exploring the philological implications of this problem would require more space than I have. However, it is safe to separate the notion of unconditional love from the "*agape*" group of words that are specific to God. Pre-Christian sources indicate forms of unconditional love under the guise of sexual (*eros*) or amicable (*philia*) love. Humans thus have the chance to experience unconditional love without having to encompass the infinity of God's nature. Separating agapic godly love from other forms of love gives us hope that we may love unconditionally without having to meet the full demands of godly love.

II.2. The Philosophical Roots of Unconditional Love

Linking the meaning of unconditional love exclusively to *agape* would limit the human ability to love unconditionally. If unconditional love is a divine quality, then the ability to learn how to love and to make ethical choices based on this love would be unattainable.

A reading of the philosophical sources I will present shows that we can find traces of unconditional love in other words such as *philia* (amical love), *storge* (familial love), and *eros* (sexual love). In this section, I will draw on philosophical sources that describe unconditional love as a conceptual arc encompassing the divine and its human interpretation. Although the Platonic response to unconditional love is very close to the Christian tradition that it inspired, I find the Aristotelian approach to love more useful. It better fits an unconditional love that can be responsibly owned by human beings and applied in our daily lives. Whereas Empedocles' and Plato's sources insist on unconditional love as a primordial source of energy that brings life together and moves its flow forward, Aristotle emphasizes the intrinsic value of each living being and the duty we have to act upon this value. Although the Christian and Platonic analyses are valuable, this latter solution is more psychologically productive.

II.2.1. Sphairos Philotes: A Cosmology

I will start this survey with a cosmology. Cosmologies are very important sources for self-reflection. Whether we are aware of it or not, we tend to explain life through a cosmological worldview that we inherit from the place, family, and time in which we were born. Becoming aware of our cosmologies can help us develop our power to love in a conscious and ethical direction.

Love and Strife (*Philotes* and *Neikos*) are the two main ingredients of ancient cosmologies, especially for Empedocles (Diels & Kranz 1951, 308–74). Whereas Love guarantees a peaceful coexistence among everything created from the four basic elements (air, water, fire, and earth), Strife breaks these combinations apart and creates new ones. The Sphairos, an enormous organism that results from combining the four basic elements, originates when Love is strongest. We may be able

to identify the Sphairos with the "mind […] holy and immense" (φρὴν ἱερὴ καὶ θέσφατος), as mentioned by Empedocles in the B 134 fragment (Picot 2012, 21–3).

According to Empedocles' cosmology, each lifecycle starts when Love is at its zenith and produces an aggregate of the basic elements.

Philoponus, a Christian Neoplatonic commentator on Aristotle from the late 5th and early 6th century proposes an interpretation of Empedocles' Sphairos. On this interpretation, the origin of the universe is a formless, undifferentiated mixture in which the four basic elements (water, air, earth, fire) are completely merged. He interprets the Sphairos as a unified form "without qualities" (ἄποιος), in which the four basic elements lose their typical properties and shapes (Sturz, 1805, 281). This view leads to an interpretation of Love as an aggregating power in which we are submerged, losing our own qualities and boundaries. Only when Strife prevails over Love do the four elements again become separate, "out of the Sphairos, which is a single and undifferentiated body" (ἐκ τοῦ σφαίρου ἑνὸς ὄντος καὶ διαφόρου σώματος). Strife allows for qualities to be individuated (διαφοραὶ τινες δηλονότι καὶ πάθη).[14]

As opposed to Philoponus, Aristotle understands the Sphairos as analogous to "underlying matter" (ὡς ὕλη ὑπόκειται): as a substratum (τὸ ὑποκείμενον) from which the four elements come to be. Love creates a unifying matter that remains as a substratum for the emergence of individuated beings. After the cyclical disintegration of the Sphairos, and during the formation of the world, fantastic creatures appeared. These creatures were somewhat erratically composed of incongruous parts or even entire beings that existed independently. These entities were created by Strife, which separated them from the primordial mixture: "since not only were the elements blended with each other in the Sphairos but also the parts of animals" (ὡς δὴ μὴ μόνον τῶν στοιχείων ἐν αλλήλοις μεμιγμένων ἐν τῷ σφαίρῳ, αλλὰ καὶ τῶν μορίων τῶν ζῴων).[15] In his commentary on Aristotle's reading of Empedocles' cosmology, Philoponus explains how while the intelligible world is unified by Love (Simplicius, *In Phys*. 140, 25–6), Strife generates our sensible world of things, which is subject to change and alterations, by bringing separations and fights within it (141,7–9, 528, 30). Love is the substratum; Strife is the accident. Whereas Love is an intelligible aggregating energy, Strife is an individuating force that separates elements only from the point of view of the senses.

On this account, unconditional love is the element of which we are made. Despite the separation brought about by its opposite elements, such conflicts, fights, and hatred, we remain connected by this spiritual substratum. According to this cosmology, our nature is to return to this condition of unity and harmony when Love once again reaches its apex.

In this cosmology, the four basic elements belong to both these worlds: the sensible and the intelligible, what we can sense in all its differences and what we can understand as one representation of all being (Empedocles, ad B 20). When Love prevails, it reverts (ἐπιστροφή) the sensible world to the intelligible world

(Simplicius, *In Phys*. 1186, 33–35). In the process of mixing and combining, it creates the Sphairos (Empedocles, A 52,2). According to Simplicius' reading, Love is thus as "world-producing" (κοσμοποιός) as Strife (Simplicius, *In De Coel.*, 308, 4–9).

Despite the difficulty in interpreting these sources, it is worth noting that Love brings together the essence of what is intelligible to the point that its essence remains united even if Strife separates the matter. Analogically, Love (Ἔρως) is mentioned in Hesiod's *Theogony* (120–2), as one of the first divine beings: his function is to bring the different gods together. In contrast, Strife (Ἔρις) appears later (225–6) as an offspring of Night. Night is in turn a daughter of primordial Chaos (123), from which Eros also originated. In Hesiod too, therefore, Love is presented as an older and more important deity than Strife. As with the Christian tradition, this form of unifying love is divine. The Sphairos, which is internally unified and undivided, ultimately includes the entire sphere of the intelligible world and the most perfect part of our sensible world. In this cosmology, Love is the force that brings communal essence to existence. In this sense, it is unconditional. Empedocles' cosmology depicts love as an energy that keeps life interconnected even when it encounters opposing forces. Although opposing forces are necessary for life to be because they bring differences and the opportunity to perceive things that other than us, love comes back to life to show how everything belong together in an interconnected manner.

II.2.2. Platonic Love

The notion of love that emerged in the previous section resembles Plato's understanding of love as it is expressed in the *Timaeus*:

> Constructed Becoming and the All. It was good, and in It that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything; and being devoid of envy It desired that all should be, so far as possible, like unto Itself. This principle, then, shall be wholly right in accepting from men of wisdom as being above all the supreme originating principle of Becoming and the Cosmos.
>
> *(Plato, 29e)*[16]

In this passage, Plato represents love as a cosmic divine energy that serves as a source of beneficence and compassion for human beings. Divine love is a state of fullness and perfection that emanates from above without need for reciprocation. It is a supreme originating principle, explicable in the dual forces of Becoming and Order (*Kosmos*), Strife and Love, and change and unity.

This cosmic organizing principle has important effects on the structure of political life. According to Plato, it is a citizen's duty to respect the order that stems from this loving emanation if they want to live in a peaceful coexistence with others. The educational and social practices proposed in Plato's *Laws* are structured around

a psychological interpretation of this emanating love. Good citizens are those who develop an affective relationship to the ideals of the city (the laws) and to the practical expression of these ideals in other people. Two kinds of love are central to this enterprise: *eros* (passionate love or desire) and *philia* (friendship). We are familiar with the idea that virtue is not about doing the right thing but doing it with the appropriate feelings. What is required from virtuous citizens is passionate devotion towards the ideals of the city (*eros*) and an appropriate orientation toward other people (*philia*), so that citizens are recognized as equal persons of value. These two expressions of love move the government to treat its citizens as deserving of goods. It will then encourage them to treat each other with respect and justice. Citizens do not solely learn this through principles of "equality" or "justice," but through communal experiences in which they take pleasure in cultivating love.

Does this form of unconditional love belong to human beings, or do they just obey it as grateful recipients? Does Plato believe that unconditional love is a necessary foundation for political and interpersonal life?

In Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*, Lysias' opening speech (230e–234c) appears to be an ode to the conditionality of love. Lysias believes that young men should resist the advances of older men who are in love with them; they should prefer relationships with men who do not love them. The latter are safer companions because they are not driven mad by desire (*eros*). When Socrates questions Lysias' argument, he appears to praise instead a love without conditions. Overturning the conventional meaning of "madness," Socrates argues that the god-given "madness" of love orients people toward philosophical life. This madness thus turns their attention toward eternal truths rather than the earthly world. Love's madness allows us to contemplate the harmony generated by cosmic love. *Eros* as a fulfilled sensual pleasure keeps us bound up with mundane tasks, but *eros* as a mad and unpredictable force puts us in touch with our psyche. It reminds us of what we lack and encourages us to connect to the divine. Human love is dragged down by the fleeting promise of gratification. "You should know that the friendship of a lover arises without any goodwill at all. No, like food, its purpose is to sate hunger. 'Do wolves love [*agaposin*] lambs?' That's how lovers [*erastai*, from *eros*] befriend [*philousin*] a boy" (241c–d). Unfulfilled love, however, leads us to the right contemplation of ideals. This love—free from conditions and inspired by God—is a way to elevate ourselves above our limits.

Whereas worldly and sensual love looks for conditions, there is no way to contain cosmic love with conditions or measures, "by gold or clothing or beautiful boys" (*Symposium*, 211d). This state of love is the "final and highest mystery," and Diotima expresses doubt that Socrates could attain it (*Symposium*, 210a). Mortals may not be able to achieve this form of love because they are conditioned by their physical nature (208d–e).

In the *Symposium*, Plato seems to claim that unconditional love is a contemplative good that humans can hardly ever grasp. Unlike Christian *agape*, however, it is not completely impossible. Problems, dissatisfactions, and interpersonal challenges

offer us the opportunity to get closer to that love and to be responsible for the connecting movements it causes. The love that Socrates has for wisdom never expects satisfaction; it thus comes close to unconditional love.

Platonic love has become a common way to refer to a non-sexual relationship between people. It precisely indicates this loving connection that brings individuals to their essence independently of what they embody in their practical life. However, as with the Christian *agape*, this Platonic form of love is very rarely achieved due to our bodily restraints and desires.

II.2.3. Aristotle's Notion of Unconditional Love?

In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle proposes a thought experiment concerning love (φιλία) (1239a35), which illustrates the forms of unconditional love that I am presenting, that is a love that does demand reciprocation and is not motivated by utility. Suppose it were impossible for you both to know and be known at the same time by the one you loved. Would you choose to be known or to know? Like mothers who must make the hard decision to give their children up for adoption, we might choose to know rather than be known. We may believe that it is more important for our loved one to have a happier life not knowing us, than that they know us unhappily. This example falls into the category of unconditional love toward those whom you love, because it demonstrates a form of love that does not demand any reciprocation and focuses on the well-being of our loved ones.

Aristotle's notion of first friendship, rooted in the excellence of the object of one's love (φιλία), also seems to be unconditional. Human excellence is such that we can be supportive and befriend another without receiving anything in return. In Aristotle's view, friendship is an example of unconditional love.

The only problem is the pleasure we may derive from being in our friend's company. This pleasure sets a circumstantial condition for the two of us spending time together. Such a condition would be a shortcoming of our human nature, despite the virtuous excellence of this love's unconditionality.

In Aristotle, abstract and concreteness coincide in terms of the pleasure and benefit that they bring. The spiritual goodness of love also improves our corporeal well-being.

> What is to be sought is that things that are good in the abstract should be good for you too. For what is worthwhile is what is good in the abstract, but what is worthwhile for you is what is good for you: and these must be brought to coincide.
>
> *(1236a–1237a)*

Even if this Aristotelian love is termed *philia* (φιλία), it bears the same unconditional qualities as *agape*. However, *philia* has the possibility of being experienced by

human beings. Aristotle argues that everybody is either good at something or has some amount of (ethical) goodness in them (1238a35 and 1238b11 respectively). This claim applies not just to human beings but to living beings in general: there is something unconditionally valuable in everything, and it is up to us to let this unconditional value shine.

Philia and ethical goodness are intrinsic to living beings as seeds of unconditional love. It is our responsibility to cultivate them and keep them from being corrupted by life's challenges.

III. Humanistic Psychology

In the mid-20th century, a group of psychologists influenced by existentialism and phenomenology addressed love, its limits, and its meaning as it unfolds in our daily lives. Fromm's psychoanalytic approach (1956) followed by Rogers' and Myers' humanistic theories paved the way for the spread of the expression "unconditional love." This new way of considering love resonated more with the Aristotelian interpretation of love (*philia*) than with Christian *agape* or Platonic *eros*. The new understanding of unconditional love left room for individuals' responsible choices. Whereas Fromm invoked parental love as the exemplar of unconditional love, Rogers (1980) introduced the idea of "unconditional positive regard" in his person-centered approach to therapy.[17]

According to Fromm (1956), parental love should be unconditional and free from limitations. A child should not be expected to earn love from their parents. All the child needs to do is to be their child. Parental love is bliss: it does not need to be deserved, controlled, or maintained. It is outdated to believe, like Fromm, that motherly love is unconditional while fatherly love is conditional. However, he is right to point to the unconditional quality of parental love: "unconditional love corresponds to one of the deepest longings, not only of the child, but of every human being" (1956, 90). Yet, it often seems that those who did not receive unconditional love from their parents may have lost their chance to receive it from friends, teachers, or therapists as they grow older—which would make our society a colder place mostly open to a transactional form of love.

Rogers defined as the positive regard that the therapist owes to their clients as unconditional. This "unconditional positive regard" gives us all a chance to be seen and loved, regardless of our life experiences.

> I have called it "unconditional positive regard." When the therapist is experiencing a positive, acceptant attitude toward whatever the client is at that moment, therapeutic movement or change is more likely to occur. The therapist is willing for the client to be whatever immediate feeling is going on—confusion, resentment, fear, anger, courage, love, or pride. Such caring

> on the part of the therapist is non possessive. The therapist prizes the client in a total rather than a conditional way.
>
> *(Rogers 1980, 116)*

Rogers explains unconditional positive regard as implying "No conditions of acceptance […]. It is at the opposite pole from a selective evaluating attitude" (1980, 116). Positivity requires "a warm acceptance of the person. A genuine caring for the client." The psychotherapist accepts the client in unconditionally suspending judgment and evaluations toward them. In reference to regard, he writes that "One regards each aspect of the client's experience as being part of that client. It means caring for the client, but not in a possessive way or in such a way as simply to satisfy the therapist's own needs. It means caring for the client as a separate person, with permission to have his [or her] own feelings, his [or her] own experiences" (1980, 11).

As with unconditional love, however, positive regard must insist on healthy boundaries. Even though we care for our clients, children, or students, they are separate persons. These boundaries allow us to see loved ones for who they are, feel compassion toward their struggles, and trust in their full potential as human beings. This explicit use of unconditional love returns the divine quality of unconditional love to us: it allows humans to own unconditional love and use it responsibly.

> A sensitive ability to hear, a deep satisfaction in being heard; an ability to be more real, which in turn brings forth more realness from others; and consequently a greater freedom to give and receive love—these, in my experience, are the elements that make interpersonal communication enriching and enhancing.
>
> *(Rogers 1980, 26)*

As Rogers demonstrates, unconditional regard enriches and enhances our lives. Assuming an unconditional open attitude toward someone else refines our ability to love responsibly. This attitude helps us to gain the freedom that we would otherwise waste in the hope of controlling the outcome of our loved ones' lives. We also receive rewarding surprises because we let others enrich our lives with what they have to offer.

III.1. Ethical Questions for Unconditional Love

We can now return to the questions I raised in Section I.1. How does unconditional love apply in challenging situations? As I discussed earlier, being able to see a loved one's essence allows us to refocus attention on ourselves because in being able to see the other we are more capable to avoid confusing ourselves and our projections with whom the other really is; hence, being able to see a loved one's

essence allow us to set clear boundaries and to listen to what we lack. But as we know, daily life can be more challenging than what we can foresee in theory. What are the ethical boundaries of unconditional love? Should we accept our children if they intentionally cause harm to ourselves or others? Should we keep loving an abusive partner?

III.2. Unconditional Love in Parental Relationships

Let us assume Fromm's standpoint (1956), according to which parents should be an example of unconditional love for their children. But we often encounter parents who cannot accept a gay son, or a daughter who falls in love with the wrong man. Andrew Solomon (2012) quotes from the bioethicist Joseph Fletcher discussing children with Down's syndrome:

> There is no reason to feel guilty about putting a Down's syndrome baby away, whether it's "put away" in the sense of hidden in a sanatorium or in a more responsible lethal sense. It is sad, yes. Dreadful. But it carries no guilt. True guilt arises only from an offense against a person, and a Down's is not a person.
>
> *(Solomon 2012, 14)*

Fletcher, writing in the 1960s, clearly underestimates the power of unconditional love. Now that there is greater acceptance of babies born with Down's Syndrome and more ways to care for their needs, their life expectancy and quality of life have increased. But before this, many children were hidden in sanatoria or not permitted to live. Unconditional love is a force capable of accepting the essence of a human being in any form. In this case, however, the children were victims of parents whose love was influenced by the time in which they were living.

The situation of parents whose children cause suffering to others is more complex. What if your children commit awful crimes such as mass murder?

Take Susan Klebold, mother of Columbine shooter Dylan Klebold. When interviewed, she was asked what she would say to Dylan if he were still alive. She said that she would ask for forgiveness. She felt grief for not having understood the confusion that Dylan was feeling, for not having been able to *see* him.

Dylan clearly did something terribly wrong, and his parents had to acknowledge the tragedy that he caused. But Susan realized that the one thing she would have changed was to pay real attention to the human being she was raising and to accept his essence.

This acceptance does not erase the ethical wrong that Dylan did: it just provides existential justice for his soul. Once a person is truly seen (independent of all the dreams, projections, hopes, and demands we burden them with), then truly healthy boundaries can be established. Setting ethical boundaries does not

mean putting conditions on love. In the case of Dylan Klebold, once his mother realized the importance of seeing his suffering and true essence, her son ceased to be the cluster of projections that she and her husband imposed on him. He became who he really was—and in his mother's regret he was unconditionally loved.

III.3. The Same Problems Arise in Abusive Relationships

Is unconditional love our ultimate goal? If we say "yes," are we condemned to endure abusive relationships with our romantic partners, parents, or siblings?

I do not believe we are. Unconditional love implies the ability to see and bring to awareness the essence of the person we love. Distancing ourselves from our feeling of love just to avoid facing its challenges may lead to depression. Without love, our life might lose its meaning. If love is truly this connecting life force that Empedocles' cosmology depicts, closing the door on it would move us away from life. We might decide to use love's transformational energy on ourselves instead of directing it toward someone we struggle to love. Loving a challenging person does not mean that we must lose ourselves in that person. We might choose to conduct a separate life from them. Such a choice does not imply that we no longer love and care for them.

How often do we just see what we want to see? Lacan writes that "love is giving what you do not have to someone who does not want it" (1959, 340). There is some truth in this, however painful. Unconditional love does not mean that we are condemned to accept the justifications pushed on us by an abusive partner—quite the opposite. Unconditional love allows us to open our eyes and witness their violence. It allows us to stop making excuses for them and making sense of our life only in relation to them. Unconditional love does not mean mistreating your child, partner, or yourself because they do not meet your expectations. It means having eyes to see what kind of life they embody, and having a heart capable of welcoming the implications of that life. Perhaps that means having a son who is a mass murderer.

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl parallels the human capacity to love unconditionally with living a meaningful life. He writes that: "Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the essence of another human being unless he loves him" (1946, 111). For Frankl, love is the best way to access another being's essence; it is the best shot we have to see a person as different from us. In my work as a philosophical counselor, I witnessed the transformational power of unconditional love within an abusive relationship. Take the case of my client Julia, a middle-aged woman. She was born to a Western mother and a non-Western father. Very independent and dynamic, Julia married young into a traditional non-Western family. She built a beautiful family with her husband. In accordance with his tradition, he provided financially for her and her family while she took care of

their children. But later, his authoritarian qualities began to emerge. The situation worsened when he started having problems with his job and she began to gain more authority in hers. This triggered a negative spiral that reached its apex when he threatened to kill her. Up to that moment, he felt as if he was in control of his life and his family's lives because of his wealth. But after his working situation started to crumble, he felt as if he had lost control completely. His abusive behavior increased, especially toward his wife.

The work that Julia and I did was to clear away the projections that nurtured their marital life together. When Julia's husband threatened her life, she saw him in a different way. I encouraged her to truly see his good and bad sides and to understand the narrative of his life story. Through compassion, self-analysis, and a little humor Julia could see her husband for who he was; she found the right balance to cope with her difficult life. She kept loving him, without setting conditions on her love. But she understood that she was not *in* love with him—and she could not live with him.

"I suppressed myself for so long. Now I feel better. Now we can be friends," Julia said. She wanted to find a man with whom she could really fall in love. She could still love her husband, the man who so strongly demanded her presence in his life. But she could love him from a distance. Through unconditional love, Julia escaped the restraints of a self-sacrificing love that had kept her unhappy for so many years. Instead of providing justifications for her husband, she could focus her transformational energy on herself. She redirected the energy that she once used to love the man hoped her husband was to change her life. Being able to love unconditionally frees us from unhealthy boundaries and self-sacrificing behaviors: it improves our real vision of the human being that we are connected to.

III.4. Is Unconditional Love Self-Absorbed?

If unconditional love means that we should redirecting toward ourselves the transformational energy we want to impose on others, does that mean that it is self-centered? Dietrich von Hildebrand believes that "love alone brings the human being into full awareness of its personal existence" (2009, 30). Love involves "a transcendence of the human being from his self-centeredness toward the other" (2009, 30). Perhaps as we seek unconditional love, we become more and more focused on ourselves. But love demands that we become aware of the rich world that surrounds us. Love has the power to transform each vulnerability, flaw, and lack that seems unbearable if perceived from the edges of our self-centered void. It transforms them into something beautiful.

"Beauty will save the world," Dostoyevsky writes in *The Idiot*. Beauty brings the grace of having seen, accepted, and loved whatever the world has offered to us. Hellenistic art, the irregular faces of supermodels, the nudity of aging bodies, and ever-changing beauty standards have all taught us what a powerful instrument self-acceptance is.

Self-love does not equate to self-absorption and entitlement. Quite the opposite. Entitlement comes from a void that moves us *away* from the world—like the loss of the tragic sense that I discussed in Chapter 4. Self-love requires a sense of companionship, compassion, and truthful regard for ourselves and the world. What we cannot see and love in others is often what we cannot see and love in ourselves. The temptation toward self-absorption turns into self-care when it is touched by the awareness of true love. Being aware of our flaws and loving them is a step toward an increased capacity for love.

If we pay attention to the testimonials of people who have recovered from addiction, their regrets largely stem from having spent so long absorbed in their own thoughts and feeling sorry for themselves. They regret having missed the wonders of the world around them.[18] Blindness toward the world also darkened their inner world.

Humanistic psychology is essential to this point. As Maslow showed, unconditional love is essential if we are to grow. We need to have a positive perspective of ourselves as individuals without diminishing the richness of the world. Humanistic psychology believes that we can reach full human potential through unconditional love.

III.5. Unconditional Love in Society

How does unconditional love apply in society? How appropriate is unconditional love during trials against Nazis, for instance?

Hannah Arendt would say that love has nothing to do with politics, ethics, or society. She writes:

> I do not love Jews, I love my friends. I do not love the Nation, I love my husband. Love is a personal feeling that connects two or more people excluding all those who remain outside. Hence, by nature, love cannot be a political feeling.
>
> *(Arendt 1968, 241)*

But Arendt also taught us that we *are* politics (1943, 1968): our lives are the most obvious expression of political choices. If our personal life is intrinsically connected to our political choices, how can we leave love aside when considering those choices? In relation to Eichmann's trial, Arendt takes a stance of unconditional love as I define it. Like other victims of the Nazi regime, she invites us to see these criminals and their society for what they are in their banality and triviality (1963). Even if Arendt considers romantic love to be exclusionary, she still sees *amor mundi* (the love of the world) as a political sentiment that invites to love the world for what it is. *Amor mundi* is thus close to the definition of unconditional love I am presenting. This form of love invites us to fill the space in our heart that would otherwise be full of hatred and spite with an authentic vision of what appears in front of us.

von Hildebrand insists that love is not about being a tool for the advancement of another person's good or the good in general. Love is *Eigenleben*: a proper life lived according to authenticity and truth. It is, therefore, a life that can benefit your growth and the growth of the people around you. A life lived according to unconditional love does not necessarily require self-sacrifice or heroism. On the contrary, a life devoted to unconditional love can be a life that remains loyal to one's own sense of authenticity.[19]

The research I cited above by Andrew Solomon (2012) sheds light on the delicate intersection between personal and political love. Like Hildebrand, Solomon believes that love concerns authenticity and identity. Love brings to existence what offers itself to our eyes. To help us understand this phenomenon, he imagines vertical and horizontal lines that describe identity in political society and private life. The vertical line identifies the social, racial, and religious intersection we occupy when we are born. The horizontal line indicates what we cultivate throughout our lives according to our personal growth and values. These lines together draw a diagram that shows how identity vectors work and how much love is required to create a functional identity. For us to feel fully integrated into society, we first need loving acceptance from our family and then from our social circles. Finally, we need political acceptance. For example, if someone is not cisgender and this is not accepted by their family, then they may project this lack of acceptance into their wider social circles. From the very beginning, that person would feel wrong, not worthy of belonging, and invisible to themself and others. These feelings would be amplified in their workplace and in their social network of duties and rights. The uniqueness that this person could bring to society would be constrained by this dysfunctional acceptance. Unconditional love can be compared to concentric circles in a pond—rarely does it affect *only* the individual who lacks it. If we lack the chance to love or be loved unconditionally, the loss will make itself known in our private, social, and political lives.

Through unconditional love, we can come to existence and work on the truth of who we are. Unconditional love does not mean that we must love our partners if they are violent or unloving toward us. Unconditional love means taking responsibility for our authentic seeing: being able to see the essence of the persons we love and accept them. It means that we should live a *Eigenleben*: a life that is true to us.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed unconditional love and its challenges. We often think that we cannot love unconditionally because we would lose our boundaries or commit ourselves to self-sacrifice. This belief is fed by a religious and philosophical misreading of love. In this reading, we are the recipients of an overflowing loving energy. We are no longer responsible for owning the flow of love and learning how to use it. However, I believe that giving up on unconditional love means that we lose the opportunity to connect with a vital source of energy.

Loving unconditionally means separating our own projections from the person we love. It means being able to see that person for who they really are. In loving unconditionally, we should be able to redirect toward ourselves that transformational energy that we would otherwise impose on the one we love.

To illustrate these issues, I used the example of Ismene. Her struggles with Antigone showed us how difficult it is for her to accept her sister. Such acceptance (or lack thereof) affects our lacks and needs. I outlined the evolution of unconditional love, and how this form of love has been seen in various religious and philosophical sources as more fit for God than humans. However, Aristotle and humanistic psychology provide us with suggestions for cultivating unconditional love in our lives. They point us toward the limits that need to be overcome for this challenging love to be pursuable in our lives.

Ethical Takeaway

Love who you really are, not who you would like to be. Take some time to explore yourself and set aside the expectations that you project onto yourself.

Exercises

Philosophical Exercise #1: Seeing the Essence

This exercise aims at giving you a clear view of your loved one separate from your projections, wishes, hopes, and desires. Once the full picture of the person you love emerges, you will hopefully be better equipped to accept them for who they are and to dedicate your energy to your own growth.

1. Write a description of your loved one on a piece of paper.
2. A few days later, apply suspension to the description.[20] Abstain from forming judgments regarding the qualities you described in relation to that person. Rephrase the list with statements starting "I feel," "I see," and "I sense." Do not include statements that begin "I think."
3. Over the next few days, observe your loved one and refrain from intervening in their lives.
4. Return to your description and cross off the elements that you think belong to you. Leave only what you think truly describes the person.
5. Let three or more days pass, return to the description, and add elements that you think really belong to that person.

Work on the description for at least a month. Write and rewrite it, applying suspension, so that you can portray the persons you love as they really are and not as you want them to be. Try to see and to accept those aspects; focus your transformational energy on yourself rather than on the person you love.

Philosophical Exercise #2: The "Narcissistic" Hooks

We often become blind to another person's essence because our ego is in the way. We can be there for the people we love, we can be compassionate, and we help them if they ask. However, we cannot change them, save them, or know what is best for them. We can make decisions only regarding what concerns us: we cannot act on behalf of others. When we try to do so, our ego is taking up too much space. It prevents us from truly seeing the person we love for who they are. A good exercise is to isolate our "narcissistic" hooks that prevent us from giving sufficient space to the person we love. To do so, we might:

1. Consider what part of our ego is hurting and what part of our life we are leaving aside. To discover this, use some meditative exercise in which you actively ask yourself to reveal which part is hurting. Automatic writing or free drawing can be helpful.
2. Focus on what you want to change in others and how this connects in the part of yourself that is asking for attention. When we feel unable to love someone unconditionally, this difficulty is often connected to a blockage in nurturing that love for ourselves.
3. Let go of what you do not like in the person you want to love. What we do not like is not our problem.

Notes

1 See for example Rhoberta Shaler's podcast (retrieved from: https://shows.acast.com/hijackals-conflict-toxic-people-narcissist/episodes/4-scary-reasons-why-unconditional-love-may-be-a-dangerous-my).
2 For Rogers (1980), the word "authenticity" is largely replaced by "congruence," which refers to the ability of mirroring what is felt within. In that sense, we will base our considerations of Antigone's efforts to remain loyal to herself on the congruence she expresses between her actions and her intentions.
3 Antigone "moves from a passionate appeal to the normativity of sisterhood to an equally total rejection of her sister. From intense recognition to no recognition at all, from common blood to refusing the claim of the common" (Goldhill 2006, 157–8). Simon Goldhill attributes this to 5th-century shifts in family structures.
4 All biblical references are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.
5 See Peckham (2014, 31–92). Concerning the historical theology of love, see Brümmer (1993); Burnaby (1960); Carmichael (2004); D'Arcy (1954); Nygren (1953); Rist (1964); de Rougemont (1957); Singer (1987).
6 For example, in relation to the concepts of absolute simplicity, aseity, and Plato's theory of the *proton philon* (highest love). See in Augustine: "The perfection of His [God's] being is consummate because He is immutable, and therefore neither gains nor loses" (Augustine, Ep. 118.3.15 [NPNF 1:877]). Furthermore, God has an "ineffably simple nature" (Augustine, Trin. 15.19.37 [NPNF 3:424]). He is the "unchangeably eternal" one (Augustine, Conf. 11.31.41 [NPNF 1:319]) and the "eternal, spiritual,

and unchangeable good" (Augustine, Civ. 15.22 [NPNF 2:648]; Augustine, Doctr. Chr. 1.31.34 [NPNF, 2:1109]). For Augustine, "to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one's disposal to obtain what one desires" (Augustine, Doctr. Chr. 1.4.4 [NPNF, 2:1090]).

7 In God's "use" of humans, there is "no reference to His own advantage, but to ours only; and, so far as He is concerned, has reference only to His goodness" (Augustine, Doctr. Chr. 1.32 [NPNF, 2:1109, 1110]). "But neither does He use after our fashion of using. For when we use objects, we do so with a view to the full enjoyment of the goodness of God. God, however, in His use of us, has reference to His own goodness" (Augustine, Doctr. Chr. 1.32.35 [NPNF 2:1109]).

8 Aquinas is clear that "in God there are no passions. Now love is a passion. Therefore love is not in God" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* 1.20.1.1.).

9 For instance, Dennis Ngien theorizes that Luther's theology in fact requires divine passibility (Ngien 1995). It seems that for Luther, divine passibility is limited to God in Christ, but does not reach God in Godself. Cf. Alister (1985).

10 I changed the translation to be gender neutral at this point.

11 "Love God by admitting your utter and total inability to love God" (Singer 1987, 1:327); "No one is able to love God from his whole heart, etc., and his neighbor as himself" (Luther 1999, 34:309).

12 For some direct criticisms of Nygren, see Burnaby (1960) and Tillich (1951).

13 See Stauffer (1964, 1:37). There is a striking increase in the use of the "*agape*" word group in biblical Greek relative to extra-biblical literature around the time of the LXX. Further, while "*agapaN̆*" appears relatively frequently in Greek from Homer onward, the noun "*agape*" is not very well represented in extra-biblical Greek literature, if at all. Whether the noun "*agape*" is attested at all in pre-LXX Greek has been a matter of some dispute, although an older noun ("*agapes in*") is present in classical Greek literature.

14 See Philoponus (1999, 19, 9–24).

15 "[T]he substratum (*τὸ ὑποκείμενον*) is a single element (*ἓν στοιχεῖον*) and there is one matter for all things (*μία πάντων ὕλη*) capable of changing into one another, and if the substratum is one there is alteration (*εἰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον ἕν, ἔστιν λλοίωσις*)" (I,1 314b23–315a3, trans. Williams). According to Aristotle, Empedocles contradicts himself: "at one and the same time he maintains both that none of the elements come to be from any other, whilst everything else comes to be from them and—when he has gathered together the whole of nature except Strife into one (*λλὰ τἆλλα πάντα ἐκ τούτων, ἅμα δ'ὅταν εἰς ἓν συναγάγῃ τὴν ἅπασαν φύσιν πλὴν τοῦ νείκους*)–that from this One everything once again comes into being (*ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς γίνεσθαι πάλιν ἕκαστον*). Clearly, then, it is by their being separated out from some one thing (*ἐξ ἑνός τινος*) by various differences and affections (*διαφοραῖς … καὶ πάθεσι*), that one thing came to be water, another fire, just as he calls the sun white and hot, the earth heavy and hard. So if these differences are removed (and they are removable, since they came to be) obviously earth must come to be from water and water from earth, and similarly with each of the others, not only then, but also now—given that they change in respect of their affections. And that they can be added and again removed follows from what he has said, particularly since the war between Strife and Love is still going on, which is why they were generated then too from one thing (*ἐξ ἑνός*); for the universe (*τὸ πᾶν*) was not, presumably, fire and earth and water when it was one. One wonders whether he ought to make the One his principle (*ρχή*) or the Many—that is

to say, fire, earth, and the others in the list. Insofar as it is like the underlying matter (*ὡς ὕλη ὑπόκειται*) out of which earth and fire come to be by a process of change caused by the movement (*μεταβάλλοντα διὰ τὴν κίνησιν*), the One seems to be elementary (*τὸ ἓν στοιχεῖον*); insofar, however, as the One comes to be through the coming together of the Many (*τοῦτο μὲν ἐκ συνθέσεως γίνεται συνιόντων ἐκείνων*), and they through its breaking up (*ἐκεῖνα δ'ἐκ διαλύσεως*), it is they who are more elementary and prior in nature (*στοιχειωδέστερα ἐκεῖνα καὶ πρότερα τὴν φύσιν*)" (I,1 315a3–25).

16 Translations of Plato's work are from Cooper (1997). Where possible, I adjust these translations to use gender neutral pronouns.

17 "For me it expresses the primary theme of my whole professional life, as that theme has been clarified through experience, interaction with others, and research. This theme has been utilized and found effective in many different areas until the broad label 'a person-centred approach' seems the most descriptive. The central hypothesis of this approach can be briefly stated. It is that the individual has within him or her self vast resources for self-understanding, for altering her or his self-concept, attitudes, and self-directed behavior—and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided" (Rogers 1980, 141).

18 There are many self-help websites on the point. For example: www.sunshinebehavioralhealth.com/family-friends/addiction-self-centeredness; www.igotsober.com/self-centeredness-root-cause-addiction/; https://alcoholrehab.com/alcoholism/effects/self-absorption/.

19 By authenticity, as said above, I refer to here what Rogers wrote about being congruent—consistent with one's own intention. The literature on authenticity is vast. Here some of the most relevant sources: Bugental (1965); Friedman (1985); Gendlin (1962, 1979); Golomb (1995); Guignon (2004); Moustakas (1956); Polanyi (1983); Rogers (1957,1980); Sultan (2019); Slabu et al. (2001); Stolorow et al. (2002); Taylor (1991); Todres (2007); Throne (2019); Wilkins (2016).

20 For more on this point, see Appendix A.

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6

WHAT WOULD AN ETHICS OF LOVE LOOK LIKE?

Introduction

"My daughter is too shy." "My husband is too lazy." "I love my brother so much, but he is always so weird around my friends." If we heard someone talking like this, we would not question their love for their daughter, husband, or brother; we would think that they were just venting about someone they loved. But in the long run such an attitude might become a brick wall that divides people. When we do not feel accepted for who we are, even if we know we are loved, this love may damage our growth. The love comes with conditions: that we are not shy, lazy, or weird. In this chapter I will address the following questions: how can we love in the right way? *Is* there a right way to love, or is love just love regardless of its effects? Are good intentions the only thing that really matters?

Whereas I studied a relational form of love in previous chapters, here I want to see what kind of theory we can build around this dynamic form of love. The previous chapters attempted to find a *practical* ethics to guide our love dynamics: in this chapter I will discuss what kind of ethical *theory* works for love. Echoing the work of Fromm (1956), Peck (1978, 85) defines love as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." He continues: "Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love" (1978, 85). I do not want to propose a definition of love whose sense overlaps with and disappears in the meaning of will, but I do believe that love is an action that is heavily nurtured by feelings, emotions, and values. Whenever there is a choice to make, reason is also needed to guide that choice. That reason is the space in which I will work in this chapter to build an ethical theory of love.

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I will first discuss if and how love and ethics can communicate with each other. I will then consider the ethics of love from the perspective of the leading schools of ethical thought (i.e., utilitarian, deontological, and virtue ethics). Finally, I will propose a phenomenological ethics of love that leverages its relational quality to produce love-values for the individual and the society in which we live.

I. The Boundaries Between Love and Ethics

The etymology of "ethics" originally refers to the clothes that someone wears, not only to look proper in their own community but also to protect themselves from external agents. These external agents could be climatic (cold, heat, wet) or interpersonal (shame, pride, modesty). When we talk about ethics, we implicitly refer to an interpersonal activity that situates us in connection with others in our community. On the one hand, we make choices based on our knowledge of the circumstances; on the other, we take actions in order to make those choices effective. This divide results in two components of ethics: theory and praxis.

Both in theory (the reasons why we make the choices that we make) and in practice (the actions we decide to take) it is very difficult to disentangle ethics from feelings. In this intersubjective context we often believe that something is wrong if it *feels* bad. If somebody laughs at me, for instance, I am inclined to think that they are doing something wrong. *Mutatis mutandis*, if I do not like a person's behavior, then that person is wrong.

It takes deep emotional education and self-awareness to tell the difference between something being wrong and it being hard to like or love. Teachers, counselors, lawyers, and social workers—professions that require empathetic understanding of others—might receive good training on how to handle the boundaries between ethics and loving feelings toward their clients and students. As a counselor and teacher myself, I realized that I could create a common space through compassion, understanding, and a form of welcoming love (close to Carl Rogers' unconditional positive regard). In this *Mit-Welt*—an in-between-world (in Schutz's terms)—I can encounter my interlocutors and we can both learn from each other.

Choosing to not see the difference between "wrong" and "not loving" might give rise to a punitive attitude and exclusionary feelings towards students, relatives, or clients who are not immediately lovable. This can be disruptive for everyone involved. Distraught students lose confidence in themselves because they are dismissed at school; incarcerated people feel irremediably broken as they become the target of collective hate. Giving in to the belief that those who are not lovable are *wrong* and deserve to be punished plants the seeds of hate and frustration, giving rise to a society marked by those emotions. This belief legitimates the poor treatment of those who do not do well in one's own micro or macro society of affects. I therefore believe it is important to reflect on the autonomy and

interconnection between feelings and choices, love and ethics, as they play out in our daily lives.

I.1. The Utility of Love and Society

Educating ourselves in love would increase our levels of decency toward each other. Those who need more love are often those who receive it the least, or who are least equipped to know *how* to receive it. On the one hand, these individuals may be the origin of relational problems, social disorder, or injustice. On the other hand, in a societal context we normalize and even praise unloving behaviors according to what we can gain from them. An example of the latter is the societal normalization of narcissism (Canavan 2017). An example of the former is the difficult integration of autism and schizophrenia in our society (Brummet et al. 2001).

Although people with narcissistic traits are often successful in our society, individuals suffering from less "profitable" disorders have to cope with invasions of their individuality, lack of support, cheating, and anger in their romantic and social relationships.[1] Moreover, the dichotomizing way in which psychological disorders are labeled as abnormal in their lows and as very creative in their highs shows them how difficult it is for their intimate circle to see the people affected from these disorders for who they are. This might generate feelings of inadequacy and frustration on both sides.

In my opinion, this pressure is partly fostered by an utilitarian and consequentialist ethical stance that equates goodness to usefulness. Our goodness in society is thus measured according to how functional we are for ourselves and others. In this functionality, the good and the loving coincide.[2] Being worthy of love might mean *giving* something to someone, even if what is being given is simply good feelings. If that is not possible, perhaps because a person has physical or emotional problems, the feelings they generate are not useful—and are therefore not worthwhile in terms of love.

Although I am grateful that I can do a useful job, I often remind myself that being a philosophy teacher does not *need* to be useful; *I* do not need to be useful in order to be part of society. To use an environmental metaphor, I do not want to reduce the biodiversity of my contribution in the same way that biodiversity is disappearing from our ecosystem. Making use of every inch of our fertile lands and privileging the species that we consider useful have impoverished our planet's defenses. Being useful is not necessarily a positive value; it should not be the criterion on which we measure the goodness or lovability of our choices. Some of my students find it useful to attend my classes—but being used cannot be the end goal of my passion in preparing my classes or of loving feelings for my students.

Using utility to weigh the value of human relationships transforms us into disposable products whose worth depends on how much we can give: financially, emotionally, or physically. However, which ethical system is best suited for guaranteeing a loving family, school, and society for all without being ethically indulgent,

unfair, or exploitative? How can we limit the damage that we do to each other and educate each other for the better?

I.2. Why Should We Bother? The Medicine of Love

Love is not an isolated feeling. The Stoics depict love as the cosmic force that keeps life together. Science provides us with evidence for how neurotransmitters and hormones in our bodies systematically affect us when we are in loving relationships. Lewis et al. (2000, 23) describe the transformations that we undergo:

> Our nervous systems are not separate or self-contained; beginning in earliest childhood, the areas of our brain identified as the limbic system (hippocampus, amygdala, anterior thalamic nuclei, and limbic cortex) is affected by those closest to us (limbic resonance) and synchronizes with them (limbic regulation) in a way that has profound implications for personality and lifelong emotional health.

Digital technologies today are working to make it possible to transform these interconnecting feelings into a communal reality, even at a distance. The expression "internet of the bodies" is used to show how bodies are now becoming connected: not merely as data (Liberati 2014), but as *meaning* that is produced by physiological exchanges. Fast-growing digital technologies have given us ways to hug at a distance (Cheok 2010), to transmit feelings of "awe" (Neidlinger et al. 2017), to exchange taste sensations (Cheok et al. 2011; Karunanayaka et al. 2018), and even to connect people sexually, as in the case of teledildonics and sex robots (Levy 2007; Balistreri 2018). Our responsibility to be inter-relationally loving holds even when the other person is not physically in front of us. The continuity of the affective resonance[3] of our interaffective[4] lifeworld is very important for a balanced healthy life and low allostatic load (accumulated physiological response to stress). Where love is lacking, depression and anxiety—the leading causes of disability worldwide[5]—take over, undermining quality of life. According to a 2007 Health and Human Services report,[6] getting married and staying married reduces depression in men and women. A good social support network is proven to have a good influence on conditions such as cancer and myocardial infarctions (Geckova et al. 2003). Given all the positive effects that good love has on us, it is important to refine our moral reasoning regarding love and encourage society to cultivate loving behaviors. Learning how to love should not be the privilege of healthy people who can afford counseling: it should be a right for everyone. We enter this society in utter ignorance about one of the most important emotions that regulates our personal, collective, and societal life. Failing to receive education in acceptable (ethical) forms of love, how to receive love, and how to share love may severely affect our mental well-being while increasing isolation and social stigma.

Psychotherapy is a powerful way to deliver this education, but it is a post-hoc tool that individuals often cannot afford. Moreover, psychotherapy heals our malfunctioning coping mechanisms in relation to a specific environment: ideally these coping mechanisms would not be "damaged" in the first place. If our stomach aches, we know what we should avoid eating or what we should do to feel better: the same does not happen in love. We do not know what we should do to avoid our heart aching. Instead, we learn by hurting ourselves and others. Every one of us should receive support and systematic education on such a vital topic. Moral psychology has spent considerable amounts of intellectual energy considering questions with no urgent applicability (such as having sex with chickens, pulling hair, eating dead pets, etc.).[7] We have not spent sufficient energy thinking about what kind of love can pass the universality test that is required by moral and ethical principles. In what follows, I will examine the major ethical schools to see what they would suggest for a theory of love.

II. Christian Ethics of Love: Utilitarianism

Christian ethics contains several attempts at an ethics of love: at its heart is the biblical commandment to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself.[8] Fletcher's work (1966) places love as one of the foundational principles of his situational ethics. In his writing, love (meant in the biblical agapic sense of "love thy neighbor") is the justifying principle of a consequentialist and teleological ethics for which the goal of an ethical action must always be love.[9] Every means for achieving love is ethical because it aims at a loving act and a be-loved content. The ultimate ethical goal is to bring the highest love to the largest number of people according to the given situation (agape calculus). Using Fletcher's example, a situation might arise in which a terrorist's child would have to be murdered in order to get the information that would stop a nuclear attack. Fletcher's situation ethics would say that in this case, we ought not to follow the principle "do not murder." We should instead do the most loving thing, which is killing the child. According to Fletcher, we can only derive principles from the universal law: we cannot derive other universal laws. In other words: "we cannot milk a universal from a universal" (Fletcher 1966, 27).

Love in this context is "agape," a concept that we encountered in Chapter 5. Agape is the cornerstone of many versions of Christian ethics. It is a form of charitable and at times unconditional love; biblical sources explain it as the love of God who sacrificed Jesus for us. To learn how we should behave toward ourselves and others, therefore, we should look at the form of love that God has for us and try to achieve the most loving result for the largest number of people. This raises at least two problems, one of which is demagogic and the other interpretive.

The demagogic problem is that if our love has a goal that can be best fulfilled once it reaches the highest number of people, then the morality of our love will always rely on others—not on our intentions. What is lovingly good will be

dictated by external purposes that do not enrich our character. Leslie Stephen—and virtue ethics in general—maintains that "morality is internal. The moral law (...) has to be expressed in the form, 'be this,' not in the form, 'do this.' (...) The true moral law says 'hate not' instead of 'kill not'" (1882, 155, 158). Inducing someone to die through hateful behaviors is not much less immoral than actually killing someone. For virtue ethics, the moral law must be stated only as a rule of character.

As for the interpretive problem, in our practical life we do not possess the refined interpretive tools that theologians and philologists use when reading texts. For most of us, godly love (agape) reaches us through our immediate environment: school and family, for instance. Because we get our understanding of God's love initially through our immediate environment, we may experience cognitive dissonance and guilt. These feelings arise especially when we are told that in certain circumstances we do not deserve God's love—if we are gay, for instance, or if we get divorced.

I will explain this point through the example of one of my clients—Angela. She was in her mid-20s, but she hid herself from the world for fear that something bad would happen to her. She spent most of her time at home, shying away from opportunities to engage in social activities with her peers. Angela was young, attractive, healthy, and smart, but nevertheless forced her daughter and herself to conduct retired and isolated lives. She felt high levels of anxiety and hopelessness because of her loneliness. However, she would often use romantic partnerships to live vicariously in the wider world. Through her partners' lives, Angela could enjoy the world in a way in which she would never allow herself. For years, Angela had been on-and-off with the same emotionally abusive partner who offered her an exciting life—albeit one which was not sustainable for her and her daughter's well-being.

We met for two months until we finally grasped the roots of her behavior. Coming from a very religious family, Angela had internalized a harsh view of God. This was a God who was willing to protect her just so long as she was doing the right thing—in this case, preserving her virginity for her future husband. But before her marriage, she had sex with her soon-to-be husband. From then on, it was just a matter of time before something awful would happen to her—or so she thought. Time passed. Angela got married and had a daughter with her husband. Her husband later left her; she subsequently spent most of her 20s hiding and engaging in self-sabotaging relationships. The relationships in which she found refuge were rarely sustainable because she was just a guest in her partner's world. Angela did not have a world of her own: she was hiding from a God who no longer loved her. She only rarely found shelter in her own life—instead, she found a disappointed God who was waiting to punish her. Her life-world was not there to sustain her: it was a hostile environment.

Angela's story is representative of many dysfunctional belief systems we might build around God's love. As Beverly Harrison puts it, we desperately need "a new vision of both God and humanity, a vision of holiness or godliness and a vision of

humanity as co-capacity-in-relationship" (1985, 36). On certain consequentialist and utilitarian interpretations of agape, we might feel as if we owe a debt to God. This debt may lead us to feel inadequate and unloving toward ourselves and those who resemble us. From this position, it is hard to imagine a relationship of co-responsibility that encourages the individual to do better and to discover the best version of their self. On the one hand, this version of godly love protects love from human limitations because God stands as a metaphysical principle untouched (and untouchable) by human flaws. On the other, it infantilizes human beings and their responsibility toward love. Being responsible for love as an incarnated principle that we exercise toward ourselves and others requires a mature emotional relationship with ourselves, our God, and our neighbors.

As we saw in Chapter 5, the notion of agapic love is also problematic because it involves an idea of godliness that excludes co-capacity: our nature is always lacking, whereas God's nature is perfect and excessive in its love toward us. God does not need us, but we need God. God's love might not leave space for a relationship—instead, we witness an emanation of love whose meanings can be interpreted according to the communities (school, church, or family) to which we happen to belong. If we are not responsible for the love that we give and receive because it is simply emanated by God in its different forms and meanings, what ethical framework and meaning of love is best for our attempts to create an ethics of love?

II.1. Love Thy Neighbor: A Deontological Theory

Kierkegaard develops a Christian ethics of love that is rooted in agape but situated in a deontological ethical framework. In deontological ethics, love is a duty we must undertake as human beings. According to Kierkegaard, we should obey God out of gratitude for the good bestowed on us. Love is a duty that lies in the very nature of being human and being God's creatures; being alive prompts our love for all of humanity. Everyone is my neighbor, and loving my neighbor as I love myself is the most important ethical principle. Love is a daunting duty that can combine the relative with the absolute and vice versa: "the maximum of attainment is simultaneously to sustain an absolute relationship to the absolute end, and a relative relationship to relative ends" (1995, 371). Kierkegaard's ethics differs from Fletcher's love calculation, Shaftesbury's emotion of the beauty of love, and Hume's loving feeling of sympathy for all. This ethics is closer to the objectivity and universality of Kant's categorical imperative. Human emotions and feelings may be fickle, but God's perfection constitutes a metaphysical guidance to love and to behave lovingly toward each other. Jesus' declaration "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is addressed to whomever I am in contact with or is in need of me—even if this "thou" is incarnated in an unpleasant or bad neighbor. My neighbor's despicability is the same that I can see in myself, for which God sent His son to save me. All that is unpleasant and unbearable in others is mine too because I can see and recognize it. Only my good fortune and circumstances

may have prevented me from acting on it: I should therefore be compassionate towards others' flaws as if they were my own. The same compassion that God has for me, I should have for my lost neighbor: "If someone has cut my hands off, I cannot play the zither, and if someone has cut my leg off, then I cannot dance (...) and if I myself lie with a broken arm or leg, then I cannot rush into the flames to save another's life" (1995, II, 7), "but I can be compassionate everywhere." Compassion is always possible according to Kierkegaard, even when it cannot be openly extended to our fellow neighbor.

When I meet spouses in my office who are angry with their partner, I try to light a spark of compassion. Even if they decide to exercise this compassion toward their spouse only in quiet silence or inner prayers, it is enough to make their lives more sustainable. In love, we tend to idealize our partners. We forget that they are human and have as many flaws and limits as us.

According to Kierkegaard, we are not perfect; we cannot be as good as God. We will repeatedly encounter our own limits throughout our life, but these limits are there to remind us to love—to be compassionate toward ourselves in the same way as we are toward others. As opposed to Fletcher's account, Kierkegaard's theory of love is one in which we can establish a responsible relation with God. The imperative to compassion is the most ethical and graceful way to express God's grace.

According to Kierkegaard, a life lived in active response to the grace of God is an ethical life; a life lived within the force of love is a meaningful life. The co-responsible relationship between human beings and God exists in the authenticity with which we place ourselves in relation to the call of the imperative of compassion (1995, II, 8). "Love is not an art like poetry, possible only to the few endowed for it, it is open and accessible to all" (1995, II, 10). Kierkegaard's argument is that love for individual persons is a fundamental human need—it is our main reason for living: "To love people is the only thing worth living for, and without this love you are not really living" (1995, 375). "[S]o deeply is this need rooted in human nature, and so essentially does it belong to being human that (…) even our Lord Jesus Christ, even he humanly felt this need to love and be loved by an individual human being" (1995, 155). The love that Kierkegaard expresses in these words is not a remote relationship with an unintelligible being to whom we owe obedience; it is the central core that defines our humanity and shapes our moral character. This is an ethics whose formality can be found in our own personal center. The right thing to do is determined by the best we can give to the other. This "best" is rooted in human nature. To love and to be loved are human needs for which it is worthwhile to live.

II.1.1. Kant's Pathological Love

In his search for the conditions of possibility for an ethical life, Kant states that the supreme principle of morality must be *a priori*. This means that the guiding principle for our actions cannot originate *in* our actions, and neither can it be

conditioned by the circumstances leading *up* to those actions. When human beings are tempted to make poor choices, we need to find guidance in something better than our own motives—otherwise ethics will become a sophisticated way to justify our own intentions.

However, an important objection that Kant raises against this framework is that ethics is a discipline deeply embedded in human lived experience. If a guiding principle in ethics exists, then this principle must come from a metaphysics of anthropology or psychology. Such a metaphysics investigates the conditions in which certain human behaviors can be considered right or wrong. It points us to a *ratio obligandi* (an obligation or guiding principle) ingrained in three subjective feelings. These three feelings condition our instincts to comply with duties: they are moral feelings, conscience, and love for human beings (MS 6: 339–403). Our freedom is what makes the difference to how we conduct ourselves in these subjective feelings. We can choose whether to behave in an unreflective and spontaneous manner or according to our chosen way of conduct. Freedom is a metaphysical principle whose meaning and essence we cannot know fully—nevertheless, it is crucial to the practical rationality of our decisional processes.[10] If freedom did not exist, then our decisions would be empty, our lives would be fully predetermined, and even the effort of building a society and establishing laws would be pointless. To find a justification for a decision that does not derive from the decision itself, we need to postulate the existence of freedom—this is the core of the metaphysics of morals that we discover by observing human behavior. We can establish our ethical conduct based on a rule derived from this metaphysical principle.

If we abide by this belief in the existence of freedom, we will behave respectfully toward each other's well-being and we will be aware of our own and others' feelings in the promotion of societal virtue and enlightenment. Being a responsible human ultimately leads to the maintenance of a healthy and productive society. Kant therefore writes that "when I draw up a penal law against myself as a criminal, it is pure reason in me (*homo noumenon*), legislating with regard to rights, which subjects me, as someone capable of crime and so as another person (*homo phaenomenon*), to the penal law, together with all others in a civil union" (AA VI 335). The right freedom (*rechten Freiheit*) is that freedom which encourages us to act according to a loving legality. Hence Kant's *legal imperative*: "so act externally that the free use of your choice can coexist with the freedom of everyone in accordance with a universal law" (AA VI 231). We can use our freedom to decide to act out of love or fear, to be conscientious or careless, or to act out of virtue or our lower instincts. Choosing to love means choosing to respect our humanity in accordance with the best part of ourselves.

In Kant's anthropology, every human feeling contains an inclination to a general duty aimed at increasing human dignity (VA, 4). As noted above, love is one of the three moral feelings postulated by freedom. This feeling emerges for us as a practical duty to increase human dignity according to our conscience of the moral law (MS 6:399). Our ethical commitment in the feeling of love lies in our

ability to choose whether to abide by this feeling. In love, human motivation is committed to others' happiness. When this commitment is instead resolved for one's own pleasure, love becomes pathological. Love can be pathological when the feelings it elicits are not connected to any sense of obligation but instead stem from personal temperament directed to pleasure (G. 4, 395). According to Kant, certain utilitarian conceptions of love are pathological because they are not aimed at others' happiness but at the happiness received *from* others. Kant's two definitions of love (moral and pathological) do not seem central to the development of his ethics. However, we can use his intuitions in relation to Kierkegaard's imperative to graceful compassion to imagine what a deontological ethics of love would look like.

On Kant's account, developing an ethics that dictates a single determinate action on each occasion and forbids all others "would turn the government of virtue into a tyranny" (MS 6:409). The formula of humanity as an end in itself (MS 6:237, G 4:427–9) promotes the right to co-existence and freedom (MS 6:396). No virtue can exist independently of the right end (G 4:437), which is the promotion of virtue itself (MS 6: 382) as a commitment to others' happiness as an end in itself. The right to freedom (MS 6:327) is based in human dignity. Being able to understand love and derive moral principles from it can increase human happiness and dignity. Even if the healthy form of love is not central to Kant's formal ethics, therefore, its application might increase human dignity—it represents the right end for human growth.

When I receive clients who have spent half their life in love with a narcissistic partner, we must all face a difficult ethical challenge—my client, the narcissistic partner, and I. Even after years of marriage to a narcissistic partner, a wake-up call can awaken the client to a healthier choice about love. At that point, Kierkegaard's imperative to love your neighbor as you love yourself and Kant's exhortation to dignity become paradoxical and difficult to apply. Abusive relationships are more likely when we forget about self-love and focus on grace toward others rather than toward ourselves. If someone is stuck in an abusive relationship, an *ordo amoris* disorder (Scheler 2010)[11] may occur, especially if the abused partner has learnt a self-undermining form of love. Kant's imperative to respect the dignity of our neighbor— the narcissistic partner, in this case—becomes problematic; the meaning of dignity has shifted. A person who loves a narcissist may have developed a co-dependent relationship in which they are completely blind to their own needs. They are accordingly incapable of self-love and respect for their own dignity. Loving a partner is challenging if we lose love for ourselves.

Fulfilling Kant's and Kierkegaard's imperatives may turn out to be pathological if the meaning of love is insufficiently developed. Someone may carry on loving their partner because they are scared about the consequences for their children if they do not. Or perhaps because they do not want to lose their social status or admit to themselves that it is time to change. The bar becomes lower and lower as the boundaries of their own dignity are not respected. Some people endure abuse

because they find comfort and normality in it. Does that mean that they are giving up on their freedom, choosing to delegate the responsibility for their own love to someone else? We may wonder how an ethics of love can give direction in these situations. How do Kant's and Kierkegaard's imperatives to love your neighbor in dignity and grace apply here? The universality of the deontological obligation conflicts with life's particularities.

II.2. The Ethics of Love As a Virtue Ethics

In 1973, two centuries after Kant, Frankena took up the idea of an ethics of love. He wrote an essay investigating the theoretical structure of this kind of ethics. The essay starts from two assumptions: (1) an ethics of love should be based on agapic love because this is the most inclusive form, and (2) an ethics of love must be a virtue ethics. Although the essay does not challenge this first assumption, Frankena discusses the second in great detail. According to Frankena, deontological ethics—*á la* Kant—transforms love into a duty and its morality into a tyranny. From a deontological perspective, even if the feeling of love is ingrained in the human character, its being an obligation makes love into a command. Any spontaneity connected to love gets corrupted into deontic obligations.

On the other hand, an utilitarian ethics of love makes love a means to reach a personal or divine end (gratitude or eternal life). This position makes love into a tool that we use when we want to achieve a specific goal. Such a form of utilitarian ethics, even if very flexible, implies an idea of rightness that is mostly based on a "*do ut des*" logic (I give you something in exchange for something else). This logic betrays the self-responsible and generous character of love. Frankena therefore concludes that an ethics of love should be a virtue ethics: love is simply a virtue.[12]

Virtue is preferable over duty because it focuses on responsibility toward one's own character and dispositions. In virtue ethics, intrinsic goodness is virtuous, not the external rewards expected from that goodness. A morality of love rooted in virtue ethics provides an inner moral basis for doing good that is preferable to calculations or obligations. Aretaic (or virtue) terms, such as morally good, vicious, and virtuous are different from deontic (right, wrong) or utilitarian (useful, useless) terms: they are free from the obligations and expectations that the latter imply. Whereas the latter involve normative judgments in relation to specific actions, aretaic terms are predicates of actions, intentions, and judgments.

Frankena's ethics of love is an aretaic ethics—i.e., a virtue-based ethics—guided by value predicates of actions, intentions, and judgments in relation to personal lived experiences. What kind of aretaic judgments would an ethics of love be based on? There are three kinds of aretaic judgments: (1) particular judgments in which particular actions are said to be morally good, virtuous, courageous, etc., and their opposites, e.g., "That was a good deed"; (2) general judgments in which *kinds* of actions are said to be morally good or bad, virtuous or vicious,

just or unjust, etc., e.g., "Lying is morally bad"; (3) judgments, particular or general, in which agents, motives, character traits, etc., are said to be morally good or bad, virtuous or vicious, courageous or cowardly, etc., e.g., "My grandfather was just plain good" or "Honesty is a virtue." The first group gives way to an aretaic situational ethics, in which the goodness of the situation is predicated according to the judgment we express in reference to that situation. In the second group, the judgments expressed about general actions disclose a form of basic morality that becomes a deontological guidance for future actions. The third group derives aretaic and deontological predicates from an agent-ethics that takes the subject's intention into account.

While "That was a good deed" (1) and "Love is a virtue" (2) are derivative from particular judgments, so that the former stems from particular judgments about good deeds and the second originates in judgments about the moral goodness of the actions produced by the disposition of love, the third group of judgments refers instead to the relational quality of love—"my grandfather was good" in relation to others. An aretaic agent-ethics of love allows us to emphasize love's relational and intentional qualities. It is from this third group of aretaic judgments that we can observe a virtue deriving from the action taken—by my grandfather—in reference to a specific circumstance that relates him to other agents.

Whereas deontic judgments from the second group (i.e., "love is a virtue") remain vague and difficult to apply, the third and first group of judgments tell us something about actions, agents, dispositions, motives, and character traits. In Stephen's terms (1882), an aretaic agent ethics gives as a basic injunction "Be a loving person!" "Be loving!" must be understood as a way of saying "Love and love alone is a virtue," "Being loving is alone morally good," or "The good human is the loving human." According to Stocker (1996), loving acts must be motivated *directly* by love; when apparently loving acts are done from non-loving motives, they cease to be loving acts. An ethics of love must pass through an aretaic judgment of the third kind—a judgement that shows that the action of love is good according to a good intention of love in itself and in relation to others.

This approach would answer the questions raised by Kant's and Kierkegaard's imperative. The obligation to grace and dignity implied by an ethics of love would be based on actions that require our duty to be loving. Our obligation is therefore not merely to love one's neighbor, but to *be* loving, as a character quality. New questions arise, however—can an agentic virtue ethics tolerate the imperative to be loving? Can "Be loving!" work as an obligation, or should we take it solely as a core value of virtuous behaviors?

II.2.1. The Problem of Love

This virtue ethics of love reflects on the core value of love by addressing questions such as "What is a good love life?" and "How can I live a good-quality loving

life?" "Being loving" according to agentic virtue ethics entails the ability to elaborate one's own emotions and motives so as to find the guiding principle for a loving life. As Frankena's famous saying goes, virtues without principles are blind. "Be loving!" may not be appropriate as a commanding principle: love escapes commands due to its connectedness to emotions (Stocker 1996). In this case, how do we explain the principle that gives direction to our "being loving"? The problem of an ethics of love as a virtue ethics is that love (agapic love in Frankena's case) is the whole virtue, and we are not so often used to think of this virtue as a highly relational feeling. According to Frankena, we can interpret the virtue of love as a disposition, quality, manner, or general psychological term that involves:

1. A class of action
2. A form of being
3. A disposition from God
4. A complex disposition derived from emotions
5. A form of universal love different from *eros* and *philia*

In all these cases, Frankena states, we need to suppose that the love we put at the center of this ethics is that which involves the fewest obligations or situational resolutions. Otherwise, we resolve this ethics into another type of deontological or utilitarian ethics. He therefore answers the questions we raised at the end of the previous section by combining Kant's notion of love as subjective feelings that condition our instincts to comply with duties (MS 6: 339–403) with Prichard's idea of moral goodness as a disposition toward virtue (1949). Frankena's agentic virtue ethics of love can thus tolerate the character imperative to "be loving," because the imperative is not an actual command but the fulfillment of an innate human disposition and free from obligation. In Frankena's work, love is presented as a complex disposition that produces predicates to be attributed to the relational actions of living beings and their needs (Prichard 1949).

On this account, love seems to be an agent-virtue feeling that arises in us not because we feel obligated to commit to others' happiness (as in Kant's practical love) but because we want to be loving people. However, are we not then promoting a form of moral narcissism (Atkinson 1965, Hopkins 1869) in which we are self-absorbed in our love?

If this happens, then how can such a principle work for an ethics of love? We say "be loving!", but we do not know exactly what this implies or to whom the loving is directed.

In the final part of this chapter, I will compare Frankena's proposal to a line of thought that could make this principle of love functional for an agentic virtue ethics. Similar to a theory of distributive justice, *á la* Sidgwick (1907), this line of thought points to a fair distribution of love according to the principle.

III. Reflection on These Three Moral Schools

What does the principle "be loving" say to us? Which direction does it point us in? Can we use the valuable input from these different moral schools in a coherent ethics of love? In the previous chapters, I investigated the practical side of this ethics of love; I was trying to establish some practical maxims that could inform our daily practice of love. From this investigation emerged the importance of love as co-capable functioning that promotes an inclusive form of co-existence.

I reject the utilitarian idea of love as a means to reach goals. Although the goals themselves may be loving, the "means to an end" structure of action turns the recipients of love into disposable means. Conversely, Kant's and Kierkegaard's deontological account of love provides us with an idea of love that passes the universality test and that is applicable to a wide range of situations. Their practical encouragement to express love in connection to the values of freedom, dignity, and compassion provides a practical direction for our loving actions. However, it can be difficult to apply their principles to the wide range of situations that come up in our lives. Frankena's virtue ethics sees love as an agentic aretaic virtue that is independent from external rewards and obligations but embedded in the context of its lived experience. The principle "Be loving!", as opposed to "Do love acts!", points us toward a sustainable balance between the principle's universality (as in deontological ethics) and its practical applicability (as in Fletcher's utilitarianism).

However, we still face the problem of what being loving means in daily life. How can we *be loving* without becoming self-absorbed and narcissistic? To address this problem, I will draw on Husserl's phenomenological ethics. This ethics is a praxis rooted in our volitional body (Hua-Mat IV, 186) and built on reflective investigations of our lived experiences (Ferrarello 2015).

III.1. Living Morality and Relational Meanings

The test that Husserl's ethics of love should pass concerns the balance between the blind particularism of an agentic and aretaic ethics and the empty universalism of a deontological ethics. We need an ethics of love rooted in in the active experience of the individual who behaves in a loving way, but which accords with universal principles that go beyond personal self-serving motives.

We therefore concluded in the previous section that the imperative "Be loving!" must imply a relational, active meaning of love that can function as a universally acceptable character virtue whose relational meaning is not based on self-serving purposes. If the meaning were based on such self-serving purposes, it would contradict the essence of the virtue. According to Foot (2002) and Smith (1994), morality cannot be subjective. As Kantian reasoning shows, deriving an "ought" from an "is" turns ethical principles into a sophisticated way to justify our own actions. Any crime is acceptable if its underlying ethical principles derive from the crime itself. This empirical grounding leaves no space for moral growth or higher

guidance. As I concluded in Section II.1.1, we need a metaphysics of anthropology if we are to find trans-personal reasons for actions in human experience.

The risk of such an anthropology is formalism: that is, an ethics that offers guiding principles that are not tailored on "alive" life but on static mental experiments that no longer resemble life. For some, this is the pitfall that Kant's ethics falls into. Ross notoriously claims, concerning this risk, that love cannot ever be the source of moral principles because it is too subjective; subjective motives run counter to the essential neutral principles that require us to act ethically (1930).

To overcome the limits of formalism, we can emphasize love's relational quality. Love is pivotal to ethics because it shows the highly relational quality of ethical principles as they are expressed in life choices. Through love, we can make ethics relational and therefore alive—suited to living human beings, not just to thought experiments. For instance, if we compare the meaning of "sharpness" and the meaning of "being loving" as two unknowns whose content we would like to understand, the meaning of each could be an unknown whose intrinsic sense acquires a new connotation according to the relation in which it stands:

> a good knife is a sharp knife that cuts well (a): positive relational value or sharpness (x) = a good person is a person that relates well to herself and others (b): positive relational value or being loving (c)

Being loving implies an actional morality whose unknown is a co-constituted meaning dependent on the structural relation in which it finds itself. For a good father to be a good father, he must sometimes be unpopular with his child and not give in to all their desires. Conversely, at other times he must be kind and patient with them. Instead of trying to classify meanings into rigid categories that are often elusive and reductionistic, *a relational theory of meaning* (free from utilitarian goals but loyal to character values) understands meanings as a "confluence of relationships within, between, and among bodies" (Cherwitz & Darwin 1995, 20).[13] In this sense, Husserl's phenomenology can help us to conceive meanings as alive structures rooted in lived experience. These structures posit themselves within, between, and among other bodies. The theory's relationality is conducive to overcoming the self-serving character of personal reasons for action. It endows principles with meaning—principles that would otherwise be too general for real human experience. By doing so, this theory can contribute to understanding what love means within a functional ethics capable of guiding living human beings. "To say that language means is to underscore the coalescence and intersection of the bodies" (Cherwitz & Darwin 1995, 19); the coalescence and intersection of bodies that occur when we say "I love" is far more meaningful than our attempts to find an abstraction that means love.

III.2. "Being Loving": A Phenomenological Ethics of Love

In Husserl's phenomenology, love and the guiding ethical principle of "being loving" are employed as an organizational dynamic principle. The values of love (*Liebeswerte*) are not rigid categories or external principles that dictate from above what kind of actions we should take. In analogy with his genetic theory of meaning (Husserl 1939), the values of love are seen in Husserl's later ethics as organizational principles that function as an ongoing source of meaning for our life-world (Hua 37, 42). According to Husserl and in agreement with Kant's metaphysics of morals, the roots of these values must be very deep in our psyche for them to offer true ethical guidance.[14] The shallower their roots, the less care a human being is capable of offering to others and to their own self.

Let us apply Husserl's example of a loving mother. A good mother chooses to care for her child out of a love value (Hua 27, 3–42; Hua 42, 343–60), because the child fulfills a vocational call that is based on the mother's genuine love for her child. For Husserl, the values of love are different from objective or objectifiable values (*ein gegenständlicher Wert, ein objektiver Wert*) because they are deeply connected with the intentional sources of our psychic being (Hua 37, 11, 68). The relationality addressed by the values of love does not derive from external objects but from deeper feelings that connect us to a way of being. In the mother's case, this way of being is her child even before it is born (more on this in Bernet 1994; Melle 2002).

Overcoming the problem presented in Section III.1, these values are neither static (formal, *á la* Kant) nor individual (particular, *á la* Frankena). They are highly relational and dynamic because they grow and change with the life of the person (cf. Williams and Smart 1973, 100ff.; Frankfurt 2004). A child needs the love of their parents if they are to develop well and become a good member of society. This love is always different: it varies according to the life-stage of the parents and the child. These love values are not mathematical functions toward which we are indifferent; we are their living source (Hua 42, 351; cf. Hahn 2009; Drummond 2018, 142). Acting ethically does not mean passively adhering to what is required of us, or making choices according to our convenience. Acting ethically is to responsibly answer a vocation around which our system of values is fluidly built. As for Kant, freedom and the responsibility to connect with these principles according to a felt meaning is what makes our choices ethical, and even more so regarding the ethics of love. As love-values are not abstract elements but living matter that changes with our lives, they cannot be quantified, compared, or traded (Hua 42, 356–537, 390). It would be hopeless to try to make a list of pros and cons for love-values. Although we may have a personal hierarchy that governs how we organize our lives, it would be pointless to ask a mother to calculate her values within her own practical life.[15] Just as we cannot convince others of the rightness of what we personally feel, we cannot do math with our love-values (cf. Drummond 2016). Love values are relational incarnated meanings; their meaning- and value-content

change according to the relations in which they are situated and the intentions that animate them.

III.2.1. The Conflict of Love-Values

The problem that emerges from the application of these love-values is an inevitable conflict among the love-values themselves. The commitment to resolving this conflict constitutes the core of the ethics of love. Being able to raise the right question and choose the right hierarchy of values for our loving relationships is what makes the imperative to "be loving!" so compelling. Love-values might result in unloving and destructive acts. As discussed in Section II.1.1, two partners might love each other in a harmful way because their love-values conflict. This occurs in the common pairing between a codependent partner and a narcissist partner: each partner gives the other what they crave, but not what they truly need. Their love becomes an addiction that prevents them from listening to their true vocation and reaching the deep roots of their life-values. Husserl writes:

> In the case of one [type of] values [i.e., objective values], I have the choice; the choice only has to be reasonable, I ought to choose the best among the practical goods. In the case of values that receive their personal sense from the depths of the personality and her personal love, there is no choice and no "quantitative" differences, namely no differences of weight/iness, the overriding and the overridden. A value that springs or stems from [myself], on which I myself decide as who I am, on the basis of an originary loving dedication, is a practical unconditional, an absolute ought, and binds me as the one who I am. To decide against it is to be untrue to oneself, to lose oneself, to sin against oneself, to betray one's true self, to act against one's true being ([which is] an absolute practical contradiction).
>
> *(Hua 42, 356)*

This passage shows that although Husserl's ethics generally promotes the imperative to "do the best among what is attainable" (Hua 37, 153) because it is based on objective value, an ethics built on Husserl's theory of love-values is directed at personal values that are not quantitatively different from each other. These values are based on "an originary loving dedication" (Hua 42, 356). The imperative of this latter ethics, "Be loving!", also leads to the imperative to "be true to oneself." To make a choice against one's subjective love-values would be "to betray one's true self and to act against one's true being" (Hua 42, 356). In Melle's terms, love-values "have an absolute priority over the objective values" (Melle 2007, 13). What I do for the other in a loving relationship originates from an absolute call that I also need to do for myself. The co-dependent partner might love their partner dearly but in a harmful way: they are not respecting their own absolute call to

put their own needs first. This makes the co-dependent partner's love ethically questionable.

As Husserl writes: "Streaming out from the self, pure love, as fully unfolded, outshines [*überstrahlen*] all objective values and lets their weight disappear" (Hua 42, 624). Love-values may also overrule objective values because they have an egoic structure whose roots are tightly connected to one's own self-expression. This egoic structure may lead to choices that are fulfilling for the person who makes them but which not are not always fulfilling for the recipient. For example, choosing to pursue our own vocation might release a flow of love-values that feel good for ourself, but which could be harmful for others. Take for instance a woman who wants to become a mother. Her love for her child, being fed mostly from her own expectations, may blind her to her child's true nature. Likewise, someone's vocation for their job might take time away from the people they care about. Even if a person's self is strongly activated by following their own love-values, it does not necessarily contribute to the good of their whole community:

> when one opens oneself to them [love-values], then one pours ever more richer streams of the valuing feeling from oneself, and enters delight. And the more this happens, the greater depths of the self are activated.
>
> *(Hua 42, 358)*

The stronger the connection to the egoic roots of these love-values, the more fulfilling life can be, because the self is activated and connected to the ego. But how can we guide conflict between love-values in a way that does not harm our path of love and the well-being of those whom we love?

III.2.2. How Do We Solve the Love-Values Conflict?

Connecting to our love-values may require courage and spiritual endurance. The pursuit of love-values is demanding because it brings us back to our deep roots, where we might end up harming ourselves and others. Love-values penetrate down into the root soil of our being (*Wurzel Boden*) (Hua 4, 279/292) and illuminate the realm of passivity, instincts, and sedimented drives. Such illumination may risk major upheavals.

None of us are transparent to ourselves. Humans are opaque beings; we achieve meaning through the ethical commitment to connecting with our own depths. It is up to each of us to understand the reasons for our choices, the depth of our values, and the hierarchy in which they offer themselves to us. A relational community in which our self reflects and is reflected by others is crucial for such understanding. Solitary self-reflections may help, but the I-thou exchange and exposure to the unpredictability of the other in daily life are the ultimate sources of our value awareness. This is why children can often teach their parents how to

be better and why students can show their teachers new ways to look at the subject they teach.

According to Husserl, each one of us can learn to love our own depths because we are capable of caring unconditionally for another (Hua 42, 469–70) and because we find this space in ourselves and for ourselves (the first other).[16] We feel value conflicts in the way we love *because we care*, otherwise the conflict would not arise in the first place. The love-values conflict that is central to this ethics of love is the self-evident ontological proof of care's existence. Without care, this conflict would have no reason to exist. Care is a relational force that opens us to others and moves us to self-preservation and propagation (Hua 42, 426). Once this space of relational alterity is found, it provides an endless source of meaning. Even though moving the soil of our interconnected roots can be a traumatic and disruptive experience, it is the best way to access our *locus amoris* (place of love) and to permit the needed change to happen. It is through this change that we can grow as human beings. In these deep roots we discover ourselves as the first other; by listening to this other we learn to connect with the relational alterity of our loved community. This relational alterity brings meanings and values that are always different according to the relations we have to them. As long as care exists, we will feel the obligation to care about the conflict; we will discover different solutions each time according to the situation at hand.

III.2.3. "Be Loving!" Or the Obligation To Care

We can now answer the question raised in Section III concerning the relational meaning of the imperative to "Be loving!" and the practical direction it points us in. The common trait that assimilates love-values to each other is not a formal hierarchy but the obligation to care that they elicit in the person who experiences them. In relating to these values, we become loving persons: that is, we incarnate the virtue of being loving because we care about the values. The motivating force that is at the core of a being-loving virtue is the felt sense of caring for one's own values and how they relate to others (Hua 42). To connect to our love-values means to care, and to promote the relational value of being loving in all situations and circumstances. Love thus orders us absolutely and unconditionally to care (Hua 42, 624–5). So, for Husserl:

> "The mother" is under the absolute ought of her motherly love to care for her loved one. But in this intentional direction of care for child(ren) there is the promotion of growth of the child in the direction of its own personal values of development, and even to the direction that makes humans in general and this particular human valuable (i.e. all kinds of capacities and also in the direction of the child's personal action from personal volitions)
>
> *(Hua 42, 356–7; cf. Hua 27, 46)*[17]

As discussed in Chapter 5, the unconditional ability to love lies in in the capacity to care for who a person really is and promoting their growth. The difficulty outlined by this passage lies in the plasticity of love's relationality. As lovers, we are caught in a complex net of care for the love-values of others and their loving commitments. But at the same time, we are ever changing subjects ourselves; our love-values and love commitments change while intersecting with those of others in significant ways. Problems concerning authenticity and vocation are central to this complexity, which is why an ethics of love is so challenging. For example, our personal vocation might conflict with the care we want to devote to our child. This is often the case in societies where insufficient time is dedicated for parental leave. Parents might be confronted by the unfair choice of whether to invest time in caring for their children and falling behind with work, or to develop their vocation but neglect their children. The love-values for our beloved others may sometimes be harmful—the child might feel responsible for their parents' frustration, while the parents might feel guilty about the limited time they can dedicate to their family. Their love-values may thus be filled with frustration and guilt.

Life constantly challenges us with the problem of love-value conflict in order to bring us out of our opacity and foster our capacity to love and make meaning. "Being loving" is a constant ethical challenge we face on multiple levels, not just the personal; the challenge shifts its shape according to the life moments we experience as persons and as a society (as discussed in Chapter 3). If on a personal, intersubjective, and communitarian level we manage to express care according to ethical reasoning, then we might help each other to create a better community. In the example of the parents, a "loving government" that cares for the intersubjective community can help to facilitate care in situations of inevitable love-value conflict.

Husserl explicitly says that care for loved ones follows from a certain kind of empathy.[18] I come to discover the other and reflect on the other as if they were me through this instinctive obligation to care. An empathetic apperception of the other as a subject of genuine emotion emerges as absolute ought from my caring for her and loving her. Her deepest values and obligations become mine (Hua 42, 337, 470). All genuinely loving others, whatever the content of their love, realize in their own valuations what is most significant and exquisite in their personal love. This process produces an infinite formation of ever new values (Hua 43/2, 511; cf. Hua 42, 307, 316, 324–5, 336–7, 424).

Husserlian love is insatiable in the vitality it generates. Each fulfilment of a loving act, rather than settling or reducing the feeling of love, prompts new instances of feeling from our egoic sources. Like all other emotions—and experiences in general—love involves an intention that can be fulfilled by the evident givenness of its object. But in addition to this general structure of intending-fulfilment, love also involves a simultaneous intensification in which the intention is reformed on the basis of newly released axiological forces. Husserl does not define genuine love by identifying the emotion's proper object, goal, or result, but by showing how

we can connect to that genuine love in a relational way (I-thou) and produce an infinite chain of incarnated meanings. Each case of love—erotic, romantic, filial, parental, or universally human—is genuine for Husserl insofar, and *only* in so far, as it draws from the egoic depths of the psyche. Our connections to these roots help us to interpret the relational quality of love in a way that is unconditionally caring—if sometimes conflictual—for the loved ones. An ethics of love that builds on love's relational quality thus proposes a theory of action that encourages individuals to adhere to the agentic virtue "be loving" as a form of self-responsibility and self-clarification of their love-values. These love-values animate the intentions that form the foundation of the care we nurture for ourselves and others. This ethics of love shows how personal love carries an infinite source of values and meanings. Of course, these values and meanings sometimes involve contradictions and conflicts—but it is up to us to individuate the love-values that lie at our very roots and find a caring resolution to the conflict. That is why I have shown, throughout this book, archetypal situations of difficult love in ancient sources.

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I tackled the problem of an ethics of love that would be capable of finding a balance between intellect and heart—universal rational principles and self-serving reasons. I focused on the imperative to "be loving," considering its relational quality and the love-values that fulfil its meaning. I intentionally avoided investigating the will as the primal source of this ethics. If the intellect has priority, then our ethics of love runs the risk of being a desiccated matter of rational calculation. If the will has priority, then love itself becomes blind, unable to explain its motivations. In this sense, Frankena's agentic aretaic ethics of love proposes love as a relational predicate that acquires its meaning in its relational practice. A similar way to reconcile this problem was sketched by Pascal: in his use of the term "heart," he successfully reconciles aspects of the intellect and the will without collapsing into either (Warner 1989, 161; Levi 1964, 326–8). He explains the cognitive and emotional dimensions of the heart in this famous fragment:[19]

> The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We know this in a thousand things. I say that it is natural for the heart to love the universal being naturally and itself naturally, according to its practice. And it hardens itself against one or the other as it chooses.
>
> *(L423/S680)*

Pascal invites us to clarify the love-values that animate the deep roots of our being; this is an ethical process. Our rational motivation to act has reasons that only the heart knows; its lock is often buried in that deep soil of our being. Connecting to it is an act of care—of love—that we owe to ourselves and others.

For this reason, as we saw from our brief exploration of utilitarian, deontological, and virtue ethics of love, I favor an ethics of love that does not see love as the end goal of one's actions. I want to avoid turning the recipients of love into disposable tools. I discussed the deontological proposal for an ethics of love that emerges in Kant and Kierkegaard as a formal guiding principle that can point our choices in the right direction. However, it cannot help us in resolving personal love conflicts or help us to build a loving moral character. I then considered Frankena's virtue ethics of love, borrowing the notion of an agentic aretaic judgment to "be loving." I read this judgment through the lenses of a relational theory of language and a phenomenological ethics. From Husserl's phenomenological interpretation of love and its values emerged a rich relational love ethics grounded in love-values. Love-values are deeply rooted in our egoic psyche; although conflicts might arise among them, they inspire an obligation in us to care for ourselves and the other. Indeed, it is in ourselves that we find the first other. Being loving is an agentic virtue that connects us to the deepest roots of our being and demands the imperative to care for others. This connection to love-values is the self-evident proof of care. Giving space to the values that allow us to be loving activates our self; it connects us to authentic meaning concerning our being. It is in these love-values and the exertion of this virtue that we are called to the obligation to care for others. This obligation does not call for external rewards—the virtue of being loving is itself rewarding—but it is an essential constituent of the virtuous conduct of being loving. We cannot be loving if we do not care for ourselves and others. Even if conflicts arise, therefore, they are a proof of care; it is up to our self-responsible ethical behavior to clarify the source of that conflict and find a caring way to resolve it.

Notes

1 Retrieved from: www.psychguides.com/interact/love-and-mental-illness/.
2 On this point, Iris Murdoch's novel *The Nice and the Good* (1968) is a perfect example.
3 I define affective resonance as "the capacity to share or become affectively aroused by others' emotions" (Decety 2011; Decety & Cowell 2014).
4 I use interaffectivity in this sense: "*interaffectivity* is regarded as an intertwinement of two cycles of embodied affectivity, thus continuously modifying each partner's affective affordances and bodily resonance" (Husserl 2012, 61). "Interaffectivity includes body feedback (i.e., the impression function within self and other) which is necessary for interbodily resonance. Components of interbodily resonance are: mirroring or complementing movements, body awareness (via proprioceptive body feedback), and kinaesthetic empathy; they are psychotherapeutically important in phenomena such as somatic countertransference" (Pallaro 2006).
5 WHO report, 2020, retrieved from: www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression.
6 Retrieved from: http://aspe.hhs.gov//topic/subtopic.cfm?subtopic=377.

7 In the interest of understanding the foundations of moral reasoning, people have been asked if it is okay to sacrifice one person to save five (e.g., Cikara et al. 2010 Crockett et al. 2010, Cushman 2015, Foot 1967, Mikhail 2007), accept stolen goods (Haidt & Graham 2007) burn, poison, or shock someone (Crockett et al. 2014, Cushman 2008, Young et al. 2007), have sex with siblings or dead chickens (Graham et al. 2009, Haidt 2001, Haidt et al. 2000, Haidt et al. 1993, Prinz 2006, Young and Saxe 2011), smother babies (e.g., Greene et al. 2004), eat dead pets (Wheatley & Haidt 2005), steal drugs (Kohlberg 1969), harm the environment (Knobe 2003), smash plates (Piaget 1932), pull hair (Blair et al. 2006, Nichols 2002, Nucci 2001, Turiel 1983), push someone downhill (Hamlin et al. 2007, Kuhlmeier et al. 2003), and desecrate the flag (Haidt et al. 1993). Scenarios like these have revealed surprising subtleties and dissociations in our moral reasoning. Thanks to such thought experiments, we know that the purview of moral reasoning includes not just considerations of harm and fairness, but also considerations of authority, loyalty, and purity (Haidt 2001; see also Blair 2009, Blair et al. 2006, Haidt & Graham 2007, Haidt & Joseph 2007). We know that judgments of intentionality differ for violations of harm and violations of purity (Young & Saxe 2011), differentially influence our intuitions about blame and punishment (Cushman 2008), and change depending on the causal structure of morally significant events (Knobe 2003, Mikhail 2007). Moral thought experiments have furthered our understanding of the early development (e.g., Hamlin et al. 2007) and neural bases (Crockett et al. 2010, Greene et al. 2004, Young et al. 2007, Young & Saxe 2011) of moral reasoning, and have launched vigorous debates on the relative contributions of judgments believed to be rapid, automatic, and affective and those believed to be slow, effortful, and cognitive (see Cushman 2015 for review).

8 Several ethicists and theologians have employed the concept of love as central to Christian ethics. Among many others, consider Niebuhr (1992); Outka (1972); Post (1990); Tillich (1954).

9 Agape (ἀγάπη) indicates the form of universal love which is "spontaneous and unmotivated," revealing not that we merit that love but that God's nature is love (Nygren 1953, 85).

10 It is metaphysical for different reasons; here its metaphysical quality relates to the fact that its inner sense is the condition of possibility of our lives to be lived according to our will, although its meaning escapes us.

11 By *ordo amoris* disorders we refer to those disorders in which the person has learnt to shape their sense of reality according to a way of loving others that is not always healthy. Hence their sense of reality is distorted by their loving feelings for others, (see: Ferrarello 2021).

12 Ethics of virtue and ethics of duty are the main forms of ethics that are contrasted in the literature of moral philosophy and theology. "Many moralists accept without hesitation the definition of ethics as the science of duty, and our modern mind cannot even conceive of an ethics which does not trace for each individual his path of conduct or formulate certain precepts which he is to obey. However . . . this idea is completely absent from ancient ethics" (Brochard 1901/1973 in Frankena's translation). The same contrast has been observed by Anscombe (1958), Atkinson (1965, 36f), Mayo (1958, CH.1O, 11), and Frankena (1973).

13 These are the principal foundations of such a theory according to Cherwitz and Darwin: "The notions of starting point and unidirectionality are of no service in a relational account of meaning. (2) A relational theory of meaning focuses attention on relations rather than on either language or objects; instead of being a function

of individual entities (e.g., language, objects, rhetors, auditors, etc.), meaning is the convergence of dynamic and multi-faceted relationships among, between and within entities. (3) On a relational view of meaning, entities themselves are not self-contained or monadic; relationally conceived, entities are constituted by and given integrity through their intersection and coalescence with other entities. (4) A relational theory of meaning rejects the dualist assumption that there are two separate ontological realms; according to a relational theory, language and objects, while different, are not ontologically distinct. (5) Given one through four, a relational theory of meaning holds that language does not 'refer to,' but 'refers with.' Language does not mirror objects; it is the embodiment of relationships obtaining among, between, and within what traditionally have been called 'language' and 'objects'" (1995, 19).

14 In that sense, Kant's notion of love as a moral feeling rooted in human nature is compatible with Husserl's understanding of love.

15 See Husserl: "Geiger already made the justified objection to me in 1907 that it would be ridiculous to demand of a mother to deliberate first, if the fostering of her child would be the best [thing to do] within her practical domain" (Hua 28, xlvi, cf. 419–22).

16 This aspect of loving is captured aptly by Emmanuel Levinas when he states that the emotion moves "beyond everything that can complete it" (Levinas 1961, 22).

17 I believe that this example applies to caregivers in general as much as it does to mothers in particular.

18 Empathy is also a highly problematic concept. On this point see: Englander & Ferrarello (2022).

19 See Pascal: "It is the heart that provides us with the knowledge of first principles that cannot be demonstrated. It operates by means of its own kind of perception, characterized by the verb *sentir* (feeling) and its derivations. We know the truth not only through our reason but also through our heart. It is through the latter that we know first principles and reason. The heart's knowledge of first principles such space, time, motion, and number is as solid as any derived through reason; it is on such knowledge that reason has to depend and base all its arguments. The heart feels [*sent*] that there are three spatial dimensions and that there is an infinite series of numbers. . . . Principles are felt [*se sentent*], propositions proved, and both by certainty though with different means . . ." (L110/S142).

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GLOSSARY

Agathos	good
Aischron	shame
Arete	moral virtue
Autonomia	autonomy
Autarkeia	self-reliance or the ability to be self-sufficient
Autognoteos Orga	self-known passion, self-known actions
Ate	blindness, delusion folly, ruin, mischief; but also the goddess of mischief
Ataraxia	a state of serene calmness
Daimon	fate, destiny, fortune
Dolos	trickery
Dyke	justice
Eros	erotic love
Esthelos	noble, genuine, good
Exeis	habits
Euboulia	good judgment
Eudaimonia	flourishing, happiness
Fortuna	luck, fate
Hamartia	fatal mistake
Hybris	arrogance
Kakos	bad
Kleos	glory
Makarismos	blessings
Metis	cunning intelligence
Moira	part, portion (of destiny); but also the goddess of fate
Neikos	strife, quarrels

Nomos Empsychos	law of the heart
Omma deinon	terrible, defective sight
Philia	love in the sense of friendship
Philoi	friends, allies
Phronesis	practical virtue and practical wisdom
Pathos	suffering
Time	honor, respect
Tyche	destiny, luck

APPENDIX A

How to Apply Suspension*

Suspension

As the beautiful poem of T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker', shows, we must learn how to suspend our lives and the expectations that we naturally project on it, especially when we go through a time of anxiety and spiritual disorder. If suspension is not performed, then we might incur a great deal of frustration which, clearly, will not contribute to our well-being.

What Does Suspension Mean?

In ancient philosophy, skeptics used the word suspension (*epoché*) to literally indicate parenthesis.

This exercise became popular again during the years preceding the first World War. Exercising suspension means to put in parenthesis our judgment, expectations, hopes, projections in relation to what we are living so that we look at what we have for what it is and with higher clarity. Suspending our pre-judgment about how our life should be is a useful exercise to avoid feeling drained and frustrated when the expectations are not met.

Practicing Suspension: Looking at Life With No Expectations

When we look at an object we never see the full thing because we perceive this object according to the perspective from which we are looking at it—the full picture we have in mind is the fruit of an intuition. It is very difficult in daily life to get the full picture of all the objects we interact with. It is this intuition that allows us to see *in toto* what we are looking at.

During times of anxiety and mental confusion, in fact, we might have been obliged to spend more time inside with ourselves in a social and personal environment that may not have been kind and rewarding. The level of frustration toward our flaws and impatience for what's next in our lives might have risen.

For this reason, this exercise is meant to suspend our judgments and expectations of ourselves. How do I do it, practically? I'm not into Buddhism or any form of meditation—what is this suspension that you speak of?

You do not need to be an expert in meditation or believe in Buddhism to apply this suspension. Below, I break down this practice into three simple and practical steps.

1. I Imagine. I See. I Feel. I Sense.

First, you need to learn the difference between a judgment and everything else (imagination, feeling, hope, desire, expectation, and so on). You need to become aware of what is a judgment and when it arises in you.

To do so, you can choose a specific moment of your life that feels quite charged with confused emotions and you might want to reflect on it. Once you pick a moment and you are ready to observe it, I invite you to describe it in terms of "I imagine. I see. I feel. I sense." No "I think, I believe, I claim" is allowed here.

You can practice this by yourself or with a partner. In either case, it is useful to pay attention to when the internal judge kicks in. If at any point you notice that a voice inside is judging you for feeling something inappropriate, just kindly invite that voice to leave the room.

In this phase, you need to allow yourself to feel all that you need to and open your imagination to see your world as wide as possible. Censoring yourself as inappropriate would not allow you to complete this first step successfully.

2. Am I Safe Here and Now?

In this second moment, you ground yourself and your lived experience to your body as it stands in the present. You turn your attention to your organic physical body, and you try to see what is going on inside of you. For example, notice if there are tensions and how they got there.

This is the right moment for you to let your imagination freely go with what you sense in your body and associate images to these sensations. After this exercise, you can ask yourself if you feel safe in the space where you are sitting. If any sense of gratitude or compassion arises toward yourself, or others in that moment, just let it flow and take from it as much as you can get.

3. What Part of My Life Needs Suspension?

Once you emerge from this state, you can observe what just happened. In revisiting the first two steps, you might notice that essential feelings or emotions came up. Some of them feel good, some less.

You might want to accept both and acknowledge that part of you that was willing to talk to you. You might want to remember how it felt in your body without quickly jumping to any conclusions or trying to gain any deep, final meaning.

Note

⋆ This article has been previously published on *Psychology Today* on 11/2/2021.

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